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Pharmercy Interactive AU

by [Leptailurus](#)

Summary

Dear Readers,
this story is unique in its own way. Because I am not plotting it. *You* are. When we have brought this to an end, we can all decide on a proper title for this piece together, too.

Here is what we are going to do: At the end of every chapter I will post a survey with a question that is critical as to how this story will continue. After a couple votes trickled in, I will discontinue the survey and start writing the next part. I have no idea how long this will go and how fast I will update, but let's first and foremost have some fun here.
(By the way, the AU format has been chosen because it gives us more possibilities).

So. Ready?

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

As any hospital staff and every fire worker can tell you, New Year's Eve is about the worst time of every year. It is unbelievable how often people don't even need alcohol as an extra-incinerator to come up with ridiculously stupid ideas, such as launching tiny rockets from their hands or standing on an explosive charge to see whether you they can feel the explosion under their shoe's soles. Add a couple of beers or sparkling wine to it, and the abyss of human stupidity opens up like a fresh sinkhole.

Irresponsible teenagers with even less responsible parents make up the very essence of the waiting room on this night and any new residents who ever thought a normal day in a hospital was filled with stress get to learn what it means to be truly overworked. Everyone who is not absolutely essential for the next two shifts after this one is on duty. For a full-time neurosurgeon this means coordinating five residents, eight nurses and treating injuries on a 10-minute-per-patient schedule. And that includes burns in nearly every degree of severity, clothes melted into skin and, in some of the worst cases, severed fingers and limbs.

Interspersed in this madness, a doctor may find the usual strokes, heart attacks and break downs, household injuries, food poisonings and, of course, alcohol overdoses. The most challenging part of it all? Decisions. Having a short glance at your patients to assess whether or not they can be stabilized and suffer for another day or need to be rushed into the ER, using up valuable resources – especially experienced surgeons and ER space – is the most stress-inducing part of the job and the most pressing responsibility.

The only ray of hope on such a night is that you know it is coming, inevitably and with full force. Dr. Angela Ziegler, called "Mercy" by her staff, experienced neuro-surgeon and head of the department of surgery, had made sure that there were easy-to-eat snacks, water and refreshments available for her staff on this night, that every shelf was stocked to the brim with medical supplies and everyone knew their place. The nurse that was best at judging the severity of an emergency was keeping an eye on the waiting room, her best two residents got to man their own examination room with an experienced nurse by their side and she herself faced her challenges all on her own, with a helpful nurse flitting back and forth between her examination room and the one next door.

She herself had gotten a good, solid night of sleep – it was the best she could do – and been very careful about her consumption of coffee and other stimulants. Chances were that at some point she would needed calm hands and concentration to save some delicate fingers. Re-connecting the fine nerves and tendons on mistreated hands was, after all, her specialty.

The rush started long before midnight and did not seem to let up until five in the morning. Finally, things seemed to calm down some and the waiting room was clearing. She allowed herself a snack while the nurse sat the next patient down in the examination room. After snarfing down half a wrap, she cleaned herself up, donned her third fresh lab coat for the night and returned to her examination room.

A woman, tall and strong-looking, was in the chair by the desk. She had black, shoulder-length hair, dark, nearly black eyes and a remarkable tattoo under her right eye that made it look like one of those Egyptian eye-symbols. She looked very much like she could be from that region and though Angela Ziegler was tired, she could not help but think that this was not exactly her typical

New Year's patient. Those patients were usually under 25 or male, and certainly not so attractive.

"Good morning, I'm doctor Ziegler," Angela greeted her, trying not to seem as tired as she felt.

She looked at the file, nearly missing that the patient was greeting her back. The nurse had taken all the vitals and neatly put them into a chart. The notes indicated that Angela was supposed to treat a burned hand.

She sighed. That was only hand number twenty-eight that day. She rolled her chair over to sit in front of the patient. "It says here you injured your left hand," she noted. "Let me see it."

"Alright," the woman replied calmly and held out a bandaged hand. Dr. Ziegler unwrapped the crudely applied bandages to reveal the wound. The cloth was sticking to the burned skin and she had to force herself to be patient and careful as she slowly peeled it off. The patient did not say a word, nor hiss or groan as the doctor peeled the last layer off.

"Please tell me that was not another one of those super-mega-funbusters that are so popular this year," she sighed.

"I don't know. I did not have time to look at the label," the patient replied calmly.

Angela inspected the hand, the burns forming a distinct line across thumb and index finger, down to the palm and across the entire side of the hand. Definitely a hand-launch. Why were people so damn stupid? But it had, indeed, not been a funbuster (which, Angela had noticed several times that day, were severely busting *her* fun this year!). Those left way more damage. So, probably something smaller. Still a hand-launch.

"You know, you are not supposed to fire these while holding them, right?"

"I know," the patient replied. "But it was either me or a five-year old. Who would you rather patch up?"

Angela raised an eyebrow as she reached for a disinfectant and a cotton ball to clean the burned areas. Unlike many other patients, this one did not whine about the sting.

"I'd rather patch up no one at all, to be honest," Angela replied. She tried to stay calm, but on this particular evening, the people who walked into examination room were always testing her patience, mainly by not being honest. Depending on the amount of alcohol intake, their excuses were either completely unbelievable or at least really weird and awkward.

"So you are telling me that sometime around five a.m. a five-year-old decided to launch a firecracker from his or her hand and you heroically jumped in to save the poor soul?" she hoped that while she made her disbelief clear, she wasn't being too condescending.

"Not exactly," the patient replied. It almost sounded like there was a smile in her voice. "First of all, it was one in the morning, not five. I just told the nurse earlier that she can let the more urgent patients, younger children and families go in before me while I could wait. Secondly, yes, I did grab that rocket from him just in time to save him, but not in time to save myself. But I did not have jump at him. I was right next to him and his irresponsible father – who happens to be my neighbor."

Angela moved the patient's fingers, testing them for any internal injuries, which she did not expect to be there. She did not know whether or not she should be impressed by the patient's story or take it with a grain of skeptical salt.

She decided not to reply to it at this time and just asked about the level of alcohol intake this

woman might have had.

“None,” the patient replied. “You never know who needs some clear-headed help.”

“None, alright,” Angela replied. It did not matter for the treatment, anyway. Not with this little damage. “Can you move your fingers?”

The patient moved her fingers and Angela watched, seeing that they were all perfectly functional. If she truly had let everyone else go first, then she could be congratulated for assessing her own damage well enough to know she could afford being patient. Nevertheless, that story did not exactly sound believable, neither did her behavior. Anyone waiting to be treated for four hours with a hurting hand was usually far less composed. It seemed fishy at best.

“So you never drink on New Year’s Eve, just in case you have to become captain America?”

“I’m just a lieutenant,” the patient clarified. “I’ll take note to try and do the captain-thing next year after I got promoted.”

Captain? She was how old? Angela glanced at the chart and quickly calculated. She had to be in her early thirties. So, ok, she did not look the part, but she could well be. Angela Ziegler reached for a bandage and an ointment to start patching up what would heal on its own eventually.

“Still. Hard to believe you would not relish in having the day off today. Police or military personnel can hardly have a better night out there than we have in here. If I had off tonight, you would not find me anywhere near a hospital, Miss...”

“Amari,” she helped out. “State police. I guess I have seen too many emergencies to not be vigilant tonight.” She looked at the young doctor curiously – her name tag that labeled her as head surgeon. Dr. Ziegler could hardly be older than herself, yet was leading a department. Interesting. The look on her face however, bore every bit of skepticism that anyone seeming as tired as she was could possibly bring up.

“And it just so happened that a child, right next to you, tried to launch a firecracker off his hand on your sober night off? How lucky for him that a trained police officer happened to witness all of it just in time.”

“You don’t believe me, do you?” Fareeha Amari observed.

Chapter End Notes

The poll has been closed with the following result:

64% for Mercy believing Fareeha

36% for Mercy not believing Fareeha

66 people voted. Thanks for your participation. The next part is in the making.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

The voters have decided that Mercy shall believe Lieutenant Fareeha.

Let me just say at this point: I love you all. I am having such fun with you guys in the comments! :3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Angela Ziegler sighed. “You know what, Miss Amari,” she decided. “I have spent all day listening to stories – to people being hit by rogue fireworks coming at them when their burns indicate that they were at the other end of the rocket. Stories of people heroically saving houses, cars and pets. Not to mention the classy ‘I did not see it and stepped on it’ excuse.”

Lieutenant Amari raised an eyebrow. Where was this going? And what was this accent, anyway?

“But you know the difference between them and you?” the doctor asked rhetorically. “You are *not* embarrassed. Everyone else is – so yes. I believe you. I *want* to believe there is a smart and honest person in my care tonight.”

The young police officer smiled a little, watching as Dr. Ziegler taped the bandage to secure it on her hand with careful professionalism.

“Thank you. It’s why I don’t mind sitting here and waiting. Just knowing my neighbor’s boy is asleep and pain-free and has learned something about fireworks, makes me okay with this.”

For the first time during this treatment, Dr. Ziegler smiled a little. She did believe Miss Amari – not only because she wanted to, but she had that genuine vibe, especially with what she had just said. And impeccable morals, apparently. It seemed like this could be a positive end to the night she was having. She reached for a pre-filled prescription sheet – another one of her preparations for the New Year’s night – that listed a cooling salve for burns. She signed it and handed it over. “I suggest you apply this twice a day and freshen up your bandage, then see your normal doctor in two or three days,” she instructed, “Unless anything should change – any unusual odors and colorations or severe pain or rashes.”

The young police woman nodded. “Thank you for your care.”

It made Dr. Ziegler smile even more. It was obvious she did not get thanked too often after treating someone, likely because people were pre-occupied with their own pain and other sorrows that came with getting injured enough to have to go to a hospital. Lieutenant Amari, however, dealt with stressful and worrisome moments on a daily basis and could easily keep a calm mind, think straight and consider those around her.

The doctor took a handful of notes on the injury and treatment and Fareeha was surprised she could actually read what the woman was writing. Seemed that whole claim on the terrible handwriting of doctors wasn’t entirely true. She waited as Dr. Ziegler noted down a description of the severity and location of the burns, the names of the salve and the suggested future treatment of the wound.

“You might want to discuss with your boss how much you are suited for field work at this time. Anything that is not likely to hurt your left hand is technically fine with me, but whether or not that compromises your safety is not mine to decide.”

“Understood,” Fareeha replied and got up when the doctor did. Doctor Ziegler held out her hand and Fareeha took the invitation to shake it, taking a last good look. The woman’s blue eyes were tired, but otherwise she looked surprisingly fresh – a smooth blond ponytail and a sweet smile and soft skin. It was really difficult to say how old she was.

“Get well, Lieutenant Amari,” she said as a goodbye, pulling Fareeha out of her contemplations.

“Mercy, take a break – I will handle the rest,” her colleague offered as she stepped out of her examination room to take a peek at who and what was left in the waiting room.

“No, come on,” Angela protested. “I’m on duty as much and as long as you are. Nobody gets to just leave.”

“Yes, but I haven’t done three emergency surgeries tonight,” Ben insisted. “Have you even eaten yet?”

“Yes. A snack,” she admitted. “Just a little ago.” He gave her a long, deep look, until she folded. “Half a wrap, okay?”

“What now? You bought all this food for the staff and barely had any? Inacceptable. Go and eat.”

“No, come on – I can’t leave you to all of this,” she said, gesturing at the still waiting patients. Her experienced eye could tell that while it looked like so much less work than before, there still was a good deal to do.

Ben sighed, crossing his arms. “Fine – go outside for a just moment,” he suggested on compromise, “enjoy some food and we will have you called in, if you are needed.” He mustered Angela’s skeptical face. “Alright?”

She sighed with a smile. “Fine. I’ll be by the entrance, if anyone’s looking for me.” She knew right then and there that Ben would make sure nobody would call her in. She was relieved, but feeling a little guilty.

Ben gave her a thumbs up and retreated back to his examination room. Mercy took a stroll to the kitchen, grabbed an apple, a cup of tea, two more half-wraps and a hand full of cookies. Okay, so she *was* hungry. It had been a long night with little time to eat, after all.

She piled all of that up on a plate, made sure she took off her lab coat so she wasn’t recognizable as a doctor, and moved on to the front doors where she knew there was a bench that overlooked the little walkway with the flowers and the fountain that was always switched off.

The sky was already lightening up above her, tinting the world in a sleepy blue. She sat on the bench and leaned back against the banister behind her, her plate on her lap. Only then did she allow herself a deep breath. The night was basically over – and would not come back for another 365 days.

“Taking a well-deserved break?” someone said behind her. She turned with much confusion and a bit of shock – she had deemed herself alone. Then, she was looking at the very recognizable tattoo of her last patient. The sporty woman was leaning against the lamp post in the corner with her arms crossed and a smile on her face. Mercy had walked right past her without noticing.

She took a moment to swallow the bite of apple she had had. “Oh, hello. I missed you there,” she smiled. “Lieutenant Amari, was it?” She had long since lost a reliable memory for names somewhere in the hospital daily grind.

“Fareeha Amari, yes,” the former patient confirmed, left her lamp post and walked closer to the bench to stand by the banister. “Do you need me to leave you at peace?” she asked kindly.

Mercy shook her head. “No. I like company. I am just wondering what you are still doing out here.”

“Just waiting for my ride,” Fareeha Amari clarified. She looked into the distance, as if she was trying to spot it. Mercy took another hungry bite from her apple in the meantime. As much as she enjoyed a good little chat, her desire for food was far more pressing than being polite enough to halt her eating – especially after having tasted the first bite.

Just at that moment, in the utter silence that was only disrupted by her chewing, Lieutenant Amari’s stomach gave a hearty growl... that she immediately tried to cover with a well-played, throat-clearing cough. When Angela looked over, there was not a sign of embarrassment or awkwardness on her face. She was still just looking out for her ride, seeming distracted and very professional.

Mercy grinned to herself, picked up one of her wraps and held it out. “You’ve been waiting for a while, haven’t you?”

Fareeha eyed the offered, very delicious looking food – obviously not something that a hospital canteen had mashed together. “Oh, Dr. Ziegler – I can’t – I am assuming this was brought in for the staff and it would be really unkind of me...!”

Mercy chuckled. “For the record, *I* bought that for the staff, there is plenty leftover and *I* decide where it goes.”

She took it, thankfully. “Thank you and - damn. Your staff is lucky to have you as a boss. Uhm... not that *my* boss is bad, but you know... in general.”

The young doctor chuckled again. “Just eat, Miss Amari – and I can get more, if need be.”

Fareeha bit into the heavenly bit of vegetable, chicken, sauce, lettuce and dough and it felt and tasted even better than expected. Much like Mercy, the first bite helped seeding the hunger even more. It was no surprise her body was demanding some calories, however, as this was usually her breakfast time. She ate very early so her body would have time to digest before she would go out for her morning jog, then get ready for work. She would need lots of coffee today to survive her shift. Khalil was basically picking her up for work with only an hour or so to spare.

The two of them, both hungry enough, ate in very happy silence, indulging in the food and just sharing comments about it’s deliciousness. Fareeha received a few cookies as well, but refused to let the doctor go inside to fetch more wraps or fruit. Dr. Ziegler was just finishing her own snack when a nurse in pink scrubs came outside.

“Mercy – don’t worry, not calling you back. Can you just sign off on your last patient? I think you forgot.”

Mercy took the clipboard from the nurse that still had Fareeha Amari’s sheet on top. Indeed, the area where she was supposed to sign off was still blank. She quickly scribbled her signature on there and handed it back, thanking the nurse for catching her oversight.

“I think you can go home, too. It’s going pretty quickly now, and your residents are still very enthusiastic. Ben has them under control.”

“Are you sure?” Mercy inquired dubiously.

“Absolutely. Get some rest, Mercy.” She winked, knowing the doctor’s sense of duty made her queasy about leaving early, even if it was just by a couple of minutes. “You’ve done enough, really,” she assured her before she left.

Fareeha watched her leave, then turned back to Dr. Ziegler, intrigued. “Mercy, huh? And there I thought your name tag had said ‘Angela,’” she commented.

“They like making up nick names,” Mercy explained. “It makes things a little less... hm... hierarchical, I think.”

“Ah, I see,” the police woman acknowledged. Just then, a police car pulled up in front of the entrance, stopping just at the round-about twenty steps away. Fareeha Amari waved at the driver, using her bandaged hand to show it off right away, adding a guilty shrug.

So she was indeed a police officer, given her very special ride. Mercy had done right to trust her on that. “Have a good night,” Mercy offered kindly.

“You, too.” She turned to Mercy, thanked her for the food and the treatment and wished her goodbye.

Mercy smiled. “As much as I enjoyed your company, please don’t have any reason to come back here,” she called after her with a smirk. She was seeing good police people when she was on emergency duty way too often, after all.

The young police woman stopped in her tracks, turned and walked backwards. “I’ll do my best!” she assured the doctor. Then she looked at the police car, then back at the doctor on the bench with her now near-empty plate. “Uhm... do you need a ride?”

Mercy laughed! What an offer – in a real police car. “No, thanks, I brought my own car, but that is very kind of you.”

“You know you shouldn’t be driving when you are tired, right?”

“Yes, Lieutenant. I’ll be careful,” she assured her. “It isn’t far.” She *was* tired, indeed. But then, hospital daily routines all over the world had never been particularly good at worrying about the mental state of doctors. She was expected to do surgery when tired, make life-saving decisions and deal with every kind of unwilling patient - and she was expected to find a way home even at times when buses were not running a lot. While Lieutenant Amari’s sense of duty was admirable, Mercy needed her car too much to leave it standing at the hospital.

“Alright, doctor Mercy.” She got into the passenger seat of the car and exchanged friendly greetings with her colleague before they drove off.

Mercy scooted over to the trash bin and discarded the aluminum foil from the wraps and the bit of apple core that was left. In the distance, the police car turned the corner. So this stressful night had at least ended on a good note – that was nice.

“Happy New Year...” she sighed.

Chapter End Notes

Begs the question... who can't stop thinking about the other?!

The poll has been closed with the following result:

"Mercy cannot stop thinking about Fareeha wins" with 57% of the votes.

75% of you wanted both to win (most settled for Mercy in the end).

I heard you and I am ignoring you. <3

28 people participated in the poll.

The next part has been written and just needs tweaking.

The next poll will have a lot more options to mull over.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

I just found [this](#). XD SO FITTING.

Also, special greetings to the readers/poll voters from Indonesia, UAE and Vietnam.

Okay, onward. According to our poll, Mercy can't stop thinking about a certain Fareeha Amari.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Dr. Angela Ziegler awoke that day, the afternoon sun was shining into her room. She was merely a sleepy blond mop of hair, pushed into her pillow and pulling the blanket higher to escape the flooding light. She stirred, edging closer to the alarm clock and doing a quick calculation that she had gotten a good eight hours of sleep – and it was nearly three in the afternoon.

After that her thoughts were, to her own surprise, wandering back to the previous day, namely to a young police lieutenant named Fareeha Amari, eating an offered chicken wrap and thanking her with a subtle, genuine smile. That smile was stuck in her head. Maybe she was she misremembering all of the previous night, but in her mind, Lieutenant Amari had been very relaxed during her treatment, smiling in that subtle way that was enough to make it carry in her voice. Odd... and intriguing.

Mercy rolled to her back and looked at the ceiling, calling the image of that woman back to her mind, sitting by the desk, holding out her burned hand. Angela had not looked up for the longest time, just concentrating on the hurt hand as was her job... but there had been that moment. “You don’t believe me, do you?” she recalled. Analytical, calm... curious and not at all disturbed.

She had been distracted by that very unusual tattoo, too. Now she was wishing she had asked about it and made more conversation. First the treatment, then the hunger had won over her need to chat. Yet, despite the distraction by that tattoo, some part of her mind had captured an image of Fareeha Amari’s dark eye color and thick lashes. She had no doubt that if that woman wanted to be, she could look very intimidating, which was good in her job. Add a uniform and a few badges to that and---

Oh god.

Mercy sat up in bed. Lieutenant Amari had been in casual, simple clothes, but the image of her standing upright, possibly saluting, ready for duty in her uniform...? That had to be quite a sight.

‘Angela, she was your patient!’ she scolded herself. She couldn’t help it – women in uniform with distinct muscles and a deep look in their eyes usually had her heart pounding a lot. And now, this one in particular even though she had been out of uniform that day. But she *had* one and it probably looked really good on her.

‘I should have told her to come see *me*, not her doctor, in three days!’ she scolded herself – and another part of her mind immediately reminded her again that Miss Amari had been her *patient* and that anything like that was unprofessional. A third part of her mind chimed in telling her she knew nothing about her, not even if she was married and had three children or something. And

then that first part barged into her internal debate once more, reminding her that Amari had not been wearing any rings to indicate marriage, but - so the second part intervened again - that of course did not mean she had any interest in blond, overworked doctors.

Mercy fell back onto the bed with a huff. 'Get her out of your head, silly,' she told herself. So Lieutenant Amari was very attractive. So were many women and basically that was all Mercy knew about her. Well, and that she was friendly, as she had offered Mercy a ride and been concerned about her driving abilities when tired, but that probably just came with the profession. Oh, and she was nice to talk to, relaxed, patient and very considerate because she let other patients go first even though it gave her hours of waiting time. She also had a very nice, deep voice and a cute Egyptian accent. Not to mention high cheek bones, tanned skin, thick, artfully arched eyebrows and a biceps that made itself known even under her shirt.

Because nobody was around to do it for her, Mercy whacked herself over the head with a pillow. 'You don't know her. You will never see her again,' she reminded herself. And there it was again, that other voice in her head. She *could* see her again, if she wanted to - or at least try to. She knew that she was a Lieutenant with the state police and this was the capital. There were not so many places where she could be stationed, plus, the hospital probably had her address on record, possibly even her phone number.

'But that,' retorted another part of her brain, 'is called *stalking*, Ziegler! And it is against hospital policy.'

Well, that was mean. The contact info was in her grasp and here she was, incapable of making use of it. Could she maybe find a pretext to call Miss Amari in? A forgotten piece of documentation? She could just erase something from the file and demand she would drop by some time and take care of it. But then she, Angela Ziegler, was head surgeon ... why would she be concerned with documentation that was usually taken care of by the nurses? Her mind was running a debate so heated, it made it impossible to lay still.

'Why am I even thinking about this? What if it turns out she is with someone and I am just going to look stupid trying to awkwardly flirt with her - having obviously called her in for just that purpose? I can't do that.' But if it was all in her head, it was okay to think about it, right? Thoughts were free, after all. And yet, it was embarrassing to be plotting about someone she had met only once, and for work, on top of that.

But what other chances did she have of seeing Miss Amari again? Staring at police cars until she could throw herself in front of the right one? Call the police until, by chance, she would catch Lieutenant Amari on duty? And then? 'Hello, this is Dr. Ziegler, I think you are hot'?! It was silly. A missed chance was a missed chance - if there ever had even been one in the first place. She had no reason to automatically assume that a buff police woman was having the hots for other ladies. That was really bad stereotyping right there. She should know - everyone thought *Dr. Ziegler* was straight as a pole, after all.

She wished she could believe in that stupid saying that you always meet twice in life. But even if that was true, she'd probably run into that woman again when they were both in their late sixties. And then she would regret it - she'd die a successful surgeon, alone and possibly still wondering what would have happened, if she had seized an opportunity there.

'Why so dramatic, you silly goose? Because you missed out on an attractive date with no promises of success? Come on!'

She pulled herself out of bed. 'That is enough of that,' she scolded herself, the more sane part of her mind finally taking over. 'You will forget this woman and move on.'

But of course she could not. Dr. Angela Ziegler would not have gotten where she was now if she had ever just forgotten and moved on. If she had not pestered her bosses to take her to complicated surgeries, written to the top neurosurgeon in her country five times before being accepted into his program, and refused a job offer at the off chance that she would get the better one that she was hoping for – and she had gotten it - she would not be head surgeon of a prestigious hospital today. She would not have been herself, if she had not fought to get permission for surgeries other colleagues deemed too risky to perform and she would not have gotten the admiration she had gotten. Sure, she had both won and failed, but her head had never ever given up.

So why would it now?

She did look at Lieutenant Amari's file when she was back at the hospital, easily memorizing all vital information against her will. Address, phone number, birthday, health insurance, sometimes it was a curse to be intelligent with a well-working memory. She could do nothing with this info but keep it. She could maybe walk around the downtown area where that woman lived and become a seriously creepy stalker in a place where it maybe wasn't wise to be small, lean, female and blond at night.

'I need something to distract me,' she decided while she signed off on various works of her residents. 'A fling, a change... something.' She thought of buying a bigger house (but for whom?) or a new car, she thought of picking up a fling somewhere or find a new branch of voluntary work someplace, maybe spend more time at the gym. She could not let her head be possessed by this thought of 'what if'. What if she had accepted the ride home, what if she had asked for Miss Amari to give her her phone number voluntarily, what if she had slipped her a business card at some point, what if she had asked her to come back to get that injury checked out? It was nerve-wrecking, frustrating, distracting and upsetting. She slammed the top-most folder shut.

"Dr. Ziegler!"

The force had been too much – she had spilled all the files across the floor.

"Liebe Güte, I am so sorry!" She knelt down to help the nurse pick them up.

Chapter End Notes

Now here is a lengthy poll for you!

How do Angela and Fareeha meet again?

This poll has been closed after 122 votes with the following results:

- Mercy takes frequent strolls through Fareeha's neighbourhood, unable to keep away. - 0 %
(What would have happened? Mercy would have gotten mugged and seeked Fareeha out for help)
- An emergency comes in – Fareeha got injured on duty. 34%
(yeah, you cruel people chose this one)

- An emergency comes in – Fareeha is on duty, accompanying someone injured.

17%

(What would have happened? The patient would have been a culprit, namely a young hacker named Sombra, who was caught among the Los Muertos, causing conflict between Mercy and Pharah because Mercy - as per hippocratic oath - would have not cared about this background, unlike Pharah)

- Mercy is caught in a situation that requires police assistance. 23%

(What would have happened? - Mercy would have come home to her house being unlocked, lights in the window. She would have called the police just in time for them to witness her being assaulted in her garage - Pharah and Khalil would have been ordered to the scene and saved her from a disturbed, angry ex-patient.)

- Both the hospital and the police participate in a career fair – Fareeha helps manning an information booth, and so does Mercy 10%

(What would have happened? - They would have gone to lunch together and this time, Mercy would not have let this chance pass. Pharah would have been flattered, surprised and left things open.)

- What better place to run into each other than the local gym? 16%

(What would have happened? - Lots of embarrassment for Mercy who cannot possibly keep up with Pharah's well-trained body, but would awkwardly have tried to impress her, overdoing it. Pharah would have been amused by this and offered her personal assistance for a more balanced training session.)

I have detailed ideas for all of these options and that you are only going to be able to pick one is slowly killing me inside. There are ways this story could become fluffy, dramatic, awkward or scary... Good luck picking.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

You might want to go back to the previous chapter and read my notes at the bottom. They detail the poll results and also offer brief summaries for the options you have not picked.

What you have picked is that Fareeha gets injured on duty (34% voted for this).

Well, your choices will get a lot worse from here on.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was late in the evening when an emergency came in. Angela was on duty and it was about an hour before the end of her shift. She was alerted to the incoming emergency via a special system that called her right out of the break room and rushed to meet the incoming ambulance by the door, introducing herself as the responsible party in this case.

The emergency group was followed by a policeman in full uniform looking distressed and worried. This reeked highly of an on-duty injury that happened rarely, but tended to be severe and often life-threatening. Adrenaline rushed through her veins - moments of stress and high alert were luckily something that made her a *better* doctor.

She immediately asked for details on the patient, knowing that the people rushing in were trained to succinctly relate all vital information they had gathered on their way here. The emergency specialist related them to her: "Female, 32 years, blunt force trauma to the abdomen, suspected ruptured spleen, shards in her lower back, further damage unknown." Another EMT related the latest information about the patient's vital signs to her - such as blood pressure, pulse and heart rate.

The double injury explained why the patient was brought in laying on her side. She too was in a police uniform - or at least the pants - as everything else had already been cut off of her. She was covered in a sheet to keep her warm and cringing with her legs pulled up as much as the thin stretcher would allow. In passing, Mercy lifted the sheet to see a sprinkle of glass shards on her lower back, all of the areas tinted red with small traces of trickling blood. She rushed to the other side, feeling the woman's abdomen above the spleen, confirming the emergency team's suspicions and producing a pain-filled cry from the patient.

Dr. Ziegler try to keep her head calm, but it was obvious that the case would end in an emergency surgery. She grabbed her a little flashlight to check the patient's current reflexes and reactions for herself and moved on past the EMT at the top of the stretcher to the patient's head.

She was in for a shock. Dark black hair, dark black eyes and a very distinct, uncanny tattoo under her eye... her heart stung there for a moment - no it could not be! It should not be! Not like this!!!

"Miss Amari, can you hear me?" she said while they were still rushing into the heart of the ward. The young woman groaned in response, but managed to press out a painful "yes".

"You are going to have to go through surgery, have you eaten anything in the last few hours?" Angela tried to focus on her profession - if she wanted to help this woman, it was the best she

could do.

"She has," her male colleague behind them replied. "Pizza," he added uselessly. Mercy assessed the time they had before the internal bleeding might become too severe. It was difficult to tell. She ordered the helpers around her to wheel lieutenant Amari to the x-ray machine, hoping it would be enough to see what she needed to see, even though she could not take a frontal picture of the affected area as she could not dare to turn the woman to her back without knowing where those glass shards were. There were better ways to see, of course, but a CT or MRI scan might simply have taken too long.

Fareeha Amari bravely held still as the picture was being taken, though her cry of pain as she was hoisted back off the table and onto the moveable stretcher was something that would be stuck in Mercy's head for a while.

"ER three," Mercy instructed her staff which was all they needed to know to get her tools ready and a specialist for anesthetics into the ER as well.

Lieutenant Amari started looking paler by the minute. She merely whimpered when Mercy touched her abdomen again, looking for changes and finding she couldn't make out anything meaningful.

"Do we put her on her back?" one of the nurses asked.

"Not yet," Mercy replied, waiting for the machine to spit out an image. She still had no idea how deeply the shards had penetrated the police woman's back and how bad it would be if her weight pushed them in more deeply. She pulled Amari's male colleague to her before he could follow the stretcher as it was wheeled to the ER.

"Tell me what happened, sir?" she demanded impatiently as they waited for the developed print. Assuming this man was a professional police man, she did not ask him to be succinct. He would be, if he was good at his job.

"We were taking out a drug dealer. Lieutenant Amari was tackled by the man and received several kicks in the stomach. That ultimately made her go down, but as she was laying on the floor and I managed to restrain the culprit, the window was destroyed from outside, likely via a small explosive. The shards hit her back."

Didn't these guys have thick protective vests to prevent exactly that? Surely, a good kick on the vest could still do some damage, but the shards? Apparently the policeman sensed her confusion and added. "Her belt had come loose in the tackle and slipped higher, under her vest. A very unlucky set of circumstances."

That must have exposed her lower back, Mercy realized.

"Thank you, er..."

"Captain Khalil."

"Please wait outside in the waiting area. A nurse will come to you with some paper work, I think."

The machine spit out an image and the policeman respectfully stepped back as she pinned it to the light and studied it.

"Verdammt Mist! Ausgerechnet da!" She grabbed the image and rushed to the ER, assessing the severity of the situation the best she could.

"Ben, she has a glass shard wedged near her spine right next to L3. If we move her in the wrong way, it might sever a nerve." Ben was aware of the meaning of this - and all the other dangers associated with badly placed glass shards in a person's body, of course. Leaving it in for later removal would give it the chance to wander, posing the same danger as accidentally shoving it in by a false movement. Turning Lieutenant Amari onto her back might be the exact false movement to seal that deal. Yet, her spleen could not be removed or fixed while the woman was laying on her side.

"Patient losing consciousness," a nurse yelled, urgently. Mercy and Ben were already rushing to get into their protective wear, even as they were still discussing the problem at hand. Ben gave brief instructions for the administration of stabilizing medicine before returning back to his conversation with Angela.

"We can remove that one shard first and then turn her on her back," he weighed the options, now also looking at the x-ray image Mercy had put up.

"She is fading already. The damage to her spleen might not allow any more hesitation."

He nodded. "We can arch her back up, try to keep that affected area off the table and just tend to her spleen for now, then wait for the surgery wound to heal enough to perform local surgery on the shard."

"...and hope it doesn't wander like glass enjoys doing," Mercy added with a sigh. She knew it was her call, in the end. She was Ben's boss.

Still not having made a decision she disinfected her gloves and rushed into the ER. Lieutenant Amari was fighting to stay awake, her brows furrowed in fear.

Mercy briefly pulled down her mask to show herself, and not look like an alien in disguise. She leaning close to Fareeha Amari. "It is going to be alright, Miss Amari," she assured her, even though she could not know for certain. "You can trust me and you'll be okay."

Her heart was pounding with fear, however. She had wanted to see Fareeha Amari so much again, but not like this! And in so much danger! She could not let this woman come out of this damaged or hurt or worse! She had to save her with her best abilities and she could not allow herself to make even the smallest mistake.

"We'll put you under now, Miss Amari. Try to breathe deeply and count backwards from ten," a nurse said. The police woman's eyes were firmly on Mercy, like they were reprimanding her not to screw this up.

Beyond that, there was still worry and fear in the woman's beautiful, dark eyes. Mercy wished she could touch her, but she was already cleaned for the surgery. She had a nurse put her face mask back on while Amari managed to count from ten to eight, leaving the beeping monitor as her only means of communication.

"I will do everything I can for you!" Angela thought before the nurse addressed her.

"Turn her over?"

That was the big question now and hers to decide. Turn Fareeha Amari to her back and risk damage to her spine or remove the shard first without truly knowing the severity of her internal bleeding, potentially wasting precious and needed time?

"Dr. Ziegler?"

Chapter End Notes

Well, you asked for this, people. Now you can be in Mercy's shoes. Because I am so very nice [mwhahaha], I will give you the stakes for your vote:

Health is unpredictable, so I have a dice here and I will roll it after you made your decision.

If you choose that Mercy removes the glass shard first, there is a small chance that Fareeha might *die* on the operating table.

- * If I roll a 1, she will flatline.

- * If I roll a 2,3,4,5, or 6, she will be just fine.

If you choose that Mercy will turn Fareeha to her back, ignoring the shard, Fareeha will definitely survive, but there is a 50% chance for lasting damage.

- * If I roll a 1,2 or 3, she will not come out of this unharmed.

- * If I roll a 4,5 or 6, she will be just fine.

So which risk are you going to take? A small potential for death or large potential for damage? Welcome to a real conundrum. *You* chose this path, now deal with it.

~~Here is your poll~~ The poll has been ended with the following result:

The poll was tied for the longest time.

52% voted to remove the glass shard first.

48% voted to ignore the glass shard for now.

Of these, 32% were shocked by what their earlier vote had done.

The poll had 94 voters (WOW!).

The die has been cast as well. :) But the result is only mine to know for now.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

You have voted to ignore the glass shard, but it was an almost 50/50 divide

This will delay the procedure on her spleen, risking more blood loss and internal bleeding - and thus, death.

I have rolled my dice - you'll see.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Don't turn her around just yet," Dr. Ziegler decided. "Keep her on the side."

Dr. Hartmut "Ben" Tibman acknowledged Mercy's decision and got ready to assist her. Mercy, though the time was running against her, took a good long moment to study the x-ray to make sure she understood where the most dangerous shard was wedged near Fareeha Amari's spine.

"Okay. Here goes," she decided and took an offered scalpel from a nurse, making a precise, careful incision close to the spine, hoping she was landing left of the shard as she had calculated, just between the spine and the dangerous, sharp edge of the object. She had to search for a while before she met a hard resistance, slippery with blood and hard to grasp. She pulled it out, dropping it onto an offered tray from Ben. It was tiny, yet so dangerous.

She had Ben clean the wound and fix it with tape and a sanitary patch. Meanwhile, Mercy considered the other shards in the patient's back. Was there time to remove them or did they need to ignore those for now? At that moment, the heart monitor made the decision for her, as it started giving out a distress signal, warning about a critical drop in the patients' heart rate.

Mercy did not waste another moment on any shards. "Turn her *now!*" ship yelled, grabbing Lieutenant Amari by the hip to help the group effort in turning her. Her vitals were dropping at an alarming speed and Mercy could just assume that the internal bleeding was more severe than she had anticipated.

The monitor was blinking and screeching, and it was difficult for anyone in such a situation to not panic, but it was her job after all. It wasn't the first time, it wouldn't be the last, but somehow it felt like there was much more at stake this time. Fareeha Amari was young, beautiful and definitely very kind – Mercy would never forgive herself if anything happened to her. But that meant, against everything she felt in her heart and against the upcoming panic, she had to be professional, stay rational and make the right decisions.

"Transfusion," Dr. Ziegler ordered, hesitating above Fareeha Amari now exposed abdomen, a fresh scalpel in her hand.

'Please don't die on me...' she begged. 'You are a strong woman, keep fighting!'

The transfusion was hooked up and a nurse stood ready with injections should the doctor demand their administration. The defibrillator, as always, was ready in the corner, but it wasn't exactly a reassuring sight. There was tension in the ER, all eyes on Mercy as the one who would call the shots. Only the monitor kept giving its distress signal.

‘Come on... don’t make me do something that could damage you!’ Mercy begged, her eyes firmly on Fareeha Amari’s pale face, the blood loss evident. ‘I can’t cut you open like this – *come on!* I know you want to live!’

The distress signal was followed by a long, scary, slightly prolonged beep.

‘Oh god, no!’ Mercy put the scalpel aside and shoved the nurses aside that were near Fareeha Amari’s chest, ready to push the heels of her hands hard on her breast bone, if she did not recover. ‘I give you another second,’ she pleaded in her mind. “Come on!” she yelled, straightening her arms, ready to put her whole weight onto Lieutenant Amari’s breast bone.

...

Beep.

Beep.

Beep.

A collective sigh of relief went through the room. Mercy closed her eyes and took a deep breath, relaxing her arms. Her experience had not failed her – Fareeha Amari had come around all on her own, strong, trained and probably willing to live. She quickly collected herself – there was no time to dwell on her relief.

She moved back to her former position, grabbed the scalpel and cut into the soft skin, revealing a bloody mess beneath. Ben was immediately by her side, soaking up blood so Mercy could see better. The rest was all sweat and concentration and listening to the ups and downs of the beeping monitor. Amari was at the edge of stability, though the transfusions helped. Mercy worked as swiftly as she could, reducing the minutes in they would spend in the ER without sacrificing precision.

Ben let her do her job, accepting that she was the better surgeon and the lead in this procedure, though he may have disagreed with Mercy’s need to save the spleen and not remove it altogether. It While Mercy had a knack for the unconventional route, she was playing too risky for his taste at this moment.

Yet, her hands were calm and stable, as always when she was in surgery. It was part of what made her so good at her job. And the truth was that the tear she was sewing up was giant compared to what she would normally patch back together – small nerves and tendons. This rupture was a giant crack in comparison and, other than the scare moment, a routine operation.

The second she had sewn the patient back up completely and cleaned the wound, she turned around, stabilizing herself on the wall for a moment, releasing the tension that had her gripped throughout the operation, but now made her dizzy as it fell off her. One of the nurses calmly offered her a chair and she took it gratefully.

“Mercy... go home. Your shift has been over for hours,” the nurse said kindly. She, too, was checking on patient Amari. “How is she?”

“She woke up briefly, but she was disoriented. She won’t remember it,” Mercy replied, rubbing over her face. “I’ll stay another moment. If she does not wake until then, I promise I will go home.”

“Alright,” the nurse acknowledged. “You know... you should probably not put your heart into any single patient so much. It’s not good for your head.”

Mercy nodded. “I know. It’s different with this one... she is from the police and she’s been here before,” she just explained. She could not tell her that she had personal, silly reasons to care for this patient. She knew that in this case, it would have been her duty to leave the main role in the operation to Ben. Then Lieutenant Amari would have spent the rest of her life without a spleen, immunocompromised and possibly spend her life taking antibiotics. The nurse left and Mercy sank back into the chair, keeping watch over Fareeha Amari. Her captain had long since left. She shrugged out of her lab coat and put it over the chair she was sitting on, looking for any twitch in Lieutenant Amari’s eyes or her fingers.

The nurse kindly brought her some water and a chocolate bar. Mercy was thankful – she badly needed some sugar and the re-hydration was also very welcome.

After a long while, Lieutenant Amari opened her eyes, heavily and slowly, trying to take in her surroundings and make sense of them. She was most likely grasping for some memories in her still cloudy mind. Mercy gave her time, until her eyes managed to focus on her.

“Nh...I know *you*...” she mumbled, squinting a little.

Mercy smiled softly. “Everything is okay, Lieutenant Amari,” she said. “You are going to be just fine.”

There was a pause in which Fareeha Amari was frowning ever so weakly, her eyes still on Mercy. “Did you...put me back together?” she asked, finally making sense of the face, the blond hair, the blue eyes.

Mercy nodded taking a glance at the heart monitor that was put on silent, except for alerts. Everything looked fine – Amari was a strong woman that would recover quickly.

“That’s good. Thanks.”

She got up carefully folded the bed sheet away from her feet. “I know you are exhausted... I just want to know if you can move your toes. I’ll let you sleep after this.”

“Nh...” Lieutenant Amari curled her toes weakly, but enough to show they were working. Relief washed over Mercy. Neither the shard nor her incision near the spine had caused any lasting damage. She carefully folded the sheets back and made sure the rest of her patient was covered warmly.

“You should sleep and get some rest,” Mercy suggested. “I’ll check on you again tomorrow.”

“Okay,” the police woman replied weakly, her eyes already drooping. Mercy got up, her hand lingering above the woman, but it would have been wrong to touch her. Not without a medical reason - and she had none. Her pulse and heart rate were monitored and she had been aware enough to talk – there were no other vitals she needed to check on.

“Good night,” she said and quietly left the room. She knew she should have left her feelings at home, but she could not. And now, it felt three times more elating to have saved this particular patient than it felt saving any other.

Mercy knocked politely, as she always did. Then she entered without waiting for an answer as per visitation routine. Lieutenant Amari was on the bed, a magazine in hand and still a little pale – but

looking much better than the previous night. She had pulled up her backrest as much as the nurse would let her, always weary to not put too much movement and strain on the fresh stitches.

“Good afternoon,” Mercy greeted and the woman on the bed gave a small smile.

“I have to apologize, Dr. Ziegler,” she said. “You told me not to come back here, if I remember correctly. Looks like I did not listen.”

Mercy took a chair and sat by the bedside. The lack of any nurses and residents trailing behind her were the only indication that she was actually on break - Lieutenant Amari hopefully did not catch that. “I did – and yet, you came in with a ruptured spleen and glass shards all over your back.” She looked at her seriously. “We will have to remove the rest of those as soon as possible, though we already caught the worst.”

“Yeah, I realize I am ... porcupine...” Amari acknowledged.

“Let me have a look at your stitches. I am hoping we can risk plucking your porcupine shards this afternoon, but I would like to make sure.”

“Of course.” She folded the blanket over to expose her tummy and obediently lifted her hospital, revealing a set of abs that Mercy had not been able to appreciate too well before she had destructed part of them by scalpel. She carefully lifted the patch above the scar and took a look at the mess of disinfectant, thread and knots beneath. Wounds rarely looked pretty, but from a medical standpoint, this was looking pretty good. The threads on the spleen would disintegrate over time, but these outer ones would have to be pulled. The important part was that they looked like they hold the strain of putting Amari on her stomach or side, so they could get to her back. Those excellent, firm muscles in the area would help with both with that procedure and the healing process.

“Can you sit up?” Mercy asked, offering a hand.

She nodded, grabbed the offered arm and pushed the other into the mattress to push herself in a sitting position, not noticing that Mercy was shifting her gaze between the wound and Fareeha Amari’s face.

“Painful?” she asked eventually.

“No, I am fine.”

Mercy smiled knowingly. “Mmh... that’s why you were clenching your teeth, right? This is not about being brave, you know?”

“Fine. It hurts,” Lieutenant Amari sighed with a guilty smile. “But not too badly.”

“And otherwise? Dizzy? Sick?” Mercy inquired.

“Strangely weak... it’s unnerving.” She frowned.

“You suffered major blood loss and went through a strenuous operation. You should not be so surprised that your body is affected,” Mercy informed her. “But it will pass soon, I promise.”

“Arguably, you had the strenuous part...! I was just laying there.”

‘Yes, and scaring the shit out of me with your wavering heartbeat,’ Mercy thought. It was nothing that Miss Amari needed to hear, though. Instead she helped her lay back down and put the patch back onto the wound, then kindly laid the blanket over her patient.

Lieutenant Amari watched her curiously, mostly because instead of leaving, Dr. Ziegler was sitting back down on her chair.

“Anything else, Dr. Ziegler?” she asked, looking mildly confused. The visitation this morning had included a nurse, two residents and very little time – now here was the head surgeon, chilling out in a chair all on her own. Not like she minded her presence, but it looked like the conversation was about to stall.

Mercy frowned. “Sorry. I am actually on break,” she admitted.

Fareeha raised an eyebrow. “And you spend it consulting patients?”

“Only the special ones,” she grinned. “No, really – I was concerned about you and I promised Dr. Tibman I’d give my opinion on your condition. Also...” She threw a meaningful glance at the door. “Have you ever tried being a doctor on break?” Then she added with a whisper: “There is no break.”

“So you hide in patient rooms?” Lieutenant Amari laughed.

“Well, I also know while a day in the hospital is really stressful for me, it is super boring for you.”

She nodded and sighed. “True. I am so sick of this magazine. I’ve read everything about three times now, but Captain Khalil will bring me some more entertainment later. Still, I am surprised I am the one who gets the honor of your company.”

Well, yes, the truth was, Mercy had a tendency to hide outside on break or literally lock up her office, not in patient rooms. The reason she was here, of course, was because she still regretted not asking Lieutenant Amari for a date. But she could not do that now, of course. Miss Amari was her patient and the hospital had very clear cut rules about personal relationships – or the attempt of them – between doctor and patient. Staff could have whatever they wanted with each other and it was absolutely possible to help treat someone who was already your partner or spouse. But coming on to someone who was dependent on your care was a big taboo.

So Angela Ziegler had two choices: Ignore the taboo and risk getting in serious trouble if anyone found out, or wait until Lieutenant Amari was dismissed and hope to catch her in time to make her move. The latter could easily put her in the same situation she had been recently: She would miss her chance, the Lieutenant would be gone and she’d be no step further.

((By the way... I rolled a four on the dice. Pharah was not in any danger.))

Chapter End Notes

Poll time - with a dice.

Your choices are for Mercy:

1. Ask Fareeha out now and risk trouble with the hospital
(1,2 --> trouble; 3,4,5,6 --> no trouble)

2. Ask Fareeha out after she was dismissed, hoping that she will catch her before she is gone.
(1,2,3 --> Pharah will be gone before Mercy can get to her; 4,5,6 --> Mercy will catch her in time)

~~Here is your poll.~~

The poll has been closed with the following results:

Ask her now and risk getting in trouble with the hospital. 48%

Ask after Pharah is dismissed, even though she might not catch her before she is gone. 52%

Thank you for 69 [*snort*] votes! *Allea iacta est!* ("The die is cast")

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

The poll has decided - Mercy will not risk anything with the hospital, but ask Fareeha out after she is dismissed.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Well, Miss Amari, I assume I will have the pleasure of plucking your porcupine spikes later today, so I will see you then,” Mercy replied with a look at her watch. She had to get going if she wanted to grab a meal.

“Sounds like fun,” Lieutenant Amari sighed and picked up her magazine to read every article for the fourth time. She quirked her lip at the sight and held it up for Dr. Ziegler to see. “I guess, I’ll be entertained.”

Mercy sent her a pitiful look. “I have nothing better to offer but long-winded analyses of nerve damage and wound treatments, unfortunately.”

“Kind of you, but no thanks,” Fareeha Amari chuckled. “I’ll just erase the entire crossword puzzle and do it again. About three times.”

“I hope your colleague will be here soon to help you out,” Mercy smiled back before she left. She was feeling strangely elated about the pointless conversation she had just had. There was a tinge of guilt in the pit of her stomach, too, mainly for looking *forward* to removing shards from Lieutenant Amari’s back.

That procedure later that day was relatively simple and uncomplicated. Mercy could refer to the x-ray image to make sure she found all the shards and did her best to keep potential scarring to a minimum. Other than that, as before, Fareeha Amari was a very pleasant patient when conscious. She let two of the residents watch, though in this case, Mercy strangely refused to let them do anything, even though plucking shards out of someone’s skin wasn’t exactly a tough job.

“Would you like to keep the shards? They are technically yours,” Mercy asked from under her surgical mask.

Lieutenant Amari was amused by that, just as Mercy had expected. “No thanks, I am good. I don’t think I need a reminder that some half-high drug-lord-wannabe and his friends got the better of me.”

Dr. Ziegler chuckled and related her agreement to that. “With some luck, in a couple of weeks, there will be nothing left to remind you.”

“Ah, that is good. Thank you.” It was still really heart-warming that this police woman was so willing to thank her doctors for doing their job.

Mercy cleaned the wound and covered it, counted the shards she had removed and the ones on the ray, just to make sure. After a moment of contemplation, she instructed her residents to send the lieutenant over for another x-ray, anyway, this time properly laid down on her stomach.

“I’d be happier to know there are absolutely no shards left. Glass is nasty and non-punctured organs are very precious.” She put the x-ray back into the file, removed her gloves and cleaned her hands. “Take a moment, and as soon as you feel ready for it, you can go sit up and back to your room. Dr. Tibman will check on you tonight and I will be back tomorrow.”

The police woman slowly sat up right away, underestimating the state she was in. She began feeling a bit woozy almost immediately. Mercy attributed the weakness to the recent operation rather than the shard removal, but assured her that it was all normal. “That’s why I told you to take your time getting up,” she scolded lightly.

“Not used to this...” Fareeha Amari mumbled and blinked her eyes repeatedly, trying to get the spots to go away.

“Now, don’t you pass out on me,” Mercy said kindly.

“Wouldn’t dream of it.” Slowly, the world came back into focus – and this time she was wiser and waited for a good long moment before moving from sitting to standing. Mercy was doing a bit of desk work with the help of her residents, keeping an eye on Lieutenant Amari until she was gone.

After that, it took another two days of chatting and check-ups before Mercy had no more reason to keep her in the hospital. There had been a few times when she had been very close to asking whether they could meet some time outside of work once this was over, but her fear of director Svenson’s fondness of rules was greater than her need to flirt.

She did not need to jeopardize her privileges in the hospital for this – there were other ways. All that she needed to do was to ensure that she did not miss out on the exact time point when Miss Amari would leave the hospital for good. At that point, she would be considered dismissed and no longer her patient. Unfortunately, there was little she could do to influence that time point or monitor when the woman would actually leave. She signed the dismissal papers on her desk, as always – but when exactly they would arrive in Fareeha Amari’s hands could at best be guessed. The nurse on duty was not the kind of person who would be willing to participate in a little conspiracy. All it took for Mercy to miss the crucial time window was one small emergency or an overlap with her rounds.

Just to make sure that she was doing everything she could to gain some control over her little mission, Mercy made it a point to sign those dismissal papers right before her break. She also kept a business card in her lab coat pocket and purposefully put Fareeha Amari’s file with the dismissal notice on top of the pile for the nurses to collect and work through. Then, passing by at the nurses’ station as often as she could, she kept a close eye on that pile. Halfway through her break (after she had wolfed down a meal, that had taken way too long in her opinion and evaded a chatty colleague) she found the topmost file was gone. That was it – Amari must have been dismissed!

She hurried down the hall, peeked into that now very familiar patient room and realized that the nurses were freshening up the bed already. With a pounding heart and absolutely no concept on how to go about this, she fled the neurosurgical wing, still wearing her lab coat. She was heading for the area where the lieutenant had, many days ago, been waiting for Captain Khalil with a freshly treated burn wound. If someone was going to pick her up, it would be there.

She did not get to the door, however – being so recognizable with her name tag and her coat. She did not even make it past the waiting room before being bothered by patients, trying to inquire about their loved ones and about current waiting times for their treatments. She understood their worries all too well, but she could neither help them, nor did she have the time or nerve for it at this moment.

“I’m sorry, sir. I have no information – please contact the nurse at the front desk,” she redirected a particularly bothersome man.

“She just told me to wait! I need to know what’s going on!”

Mercy frowned. “I understand that, sir. Trust me, I am about as informed as you are, but I am sure everyone is doing the best they can for your family and will inform you as soon as that is possible.”

“Well... you are not doing anything, *doctor*,” he grumbled.

Mercy took a deep breath and just walked past him. She did not have the nerve, the time or the patience to deal with this right now. She knew the anger was just veiled worry, as so often, and certainly not directed at her personally.

Ignoring further questions from the waiting area, she finally reached the door and stumbled outside, her gaze immediately darting to the corner where Lieutenant Amari had waited last time – but it was empty.

‘Mist! Ich hab’s schon wieder versemmt! Das darf doch echt nicht wahr sein!’* she swore at herself.

“Dr. Ziegler – is everything alright?” That voice was just so familiar now, Mercy’s heart skipped a beat. She was not in her corner – she was on the other side, sitting on the benches because she probably still wasn’t so sure about standing for too long.

“Lieutenant Amari,” she sighed with relief. “I was looking for you.”

A surprised look crossed the other woman’s face. “Oh? Did I forget anything?”

“No...!” It was now that Mercy remembered that she had come here with the intention to ask this woman out – and that it was kind of a big and slightly unnerving deal. Her heart took another leap, adrenaline rushing through her veins. She really had no plan whatsoever and it struck her as a huge oversight to have spent so much time on working out *how* to catch Lieutenant Amari in time that she had never figured out what to do *then*. And now the attractive police woman was looking at her all questioningly. “Uh...” Mercy stopped in her tracks, three steps away from Fareeha Amari. She fished around in her pocket uncertainly, finding her hand was less reliable than ever – certainly the exact opposite what that hand felt when doing surgery. Her shivering fingers finally found the business card and pulled it.

‘Come on, Mercy, be an adult about this!’ she scolded herself. She felt like a teenager, however and her hand with the card was shivering.

“Miss Amari...” she began again, trying to calm herself by taking a new, more thoughtful approach. “I know I am- *was* your surgeon, I just-“ She held out her card. “If you’d like to go get some coffee together sometime...” She could feel herself blushing, all against her will.

Fareeha felt a tinge of shock there – not in a bad way, though. She had expected a lot seeing the doctor out here, even that she would withdraw the dismissal, but certainly not *this*. She was of course well trained to deal with stressful and surprising situations, but those usually had nothing to do with herself. Now here she was, caught by complete surprise, with a cutely blushing doctor in front of her. A doctor, who probably made three times her salary in a year, had patched her back up and removed a bunch of glass shards from her back. A doctor who was obviously really nervous about this.

‘Maybe that hiding-in-my-room-thing should have tipped me off!’ Well, her reply was overdue at

this point. "Thanks," she began, gathering her thought. She decided that honesty was the best policy. "That surprised me a little." She slowly got up, finding that this difference in their positions felt a tad awkward. The distance between them was a bit much, too, so she took a step closer.

"I am sorry – I would have asked sooner but... patient and doctor and all that..." Mercy admitted. She hesitated. "You don't have to agree just because I ...uh..." She indicated towards her tummy.

"I know," Fareeha replied immediately, realizing she had yet to reply properly. "Sorry! --- I mean, I would love to grab a cup of coffee with you, Dr. Ziegler."

She did. She may have been surprised, but Dr. Ziegler was nice, pretty and they had gotten along very well. This was exceedingly sweet, to say the least.

Mercy's heart took another involuntary leap, her awkward smile turning into a happy one. She did not exactly know where to put her hands, neither a hug, nor a handshake or any other kind of touch seemed appropriate. So awkward fidgeting was the best she could do. "You can call me Angela... or Mercy, if you like that better," she managed to say.

She received a soft smile in return. "Alright, Angela," Fareeha nodded. "I'm Fareeha and," she held up the business card she had just received, "I *will* call you." She smiled and so did Mercy, evidently elated by the positive response. It was seriously cute. She was some sort of big name in that hospital after all, and yet, she looked all young and even a little awkward making this innocent request for a coffee date.

Mercy, however, sure did not feel like a big name at all in that moment. She felt mostly nervous and excited.

"YO! PHARAH!" someone called from a battered looking sports car near the roundabout. Whatever it was, it was at least forty years old. "Stop flirting and get your butt over here! Doc's outta your league, anyway!" he chuckled. It was a young man, dark-skinned with dreadlocks bound into a thick ponytail. He was laughing good-naturedly, giving away a pleasantly positive, if slightly obnoxious, attitude.

Fareeha grinned at Mercy. "Somehow, I don't think she is out of my league," she said in a flirtatious voice, her dark eyes focusing on Mercy's blue ones. The little look sent chills down Mercy's spine. Fareeha Amari then turned towards her friend. "It's my *spleen*, not my butt, Lúcio!" She waved the business card at Mercy in an indication that she would not forget to call and walked down the path towards the roundabout.

'Pharah, huh?' Mercy wondered. Seemed she was not the only one with a nickname.

She watched Fareeha get into the car's passenger seat and the two of them drove off, beyond the hospital boundaries. She could hear the bass rumbling from the little car, even when it was almost out of sight. Mercy could not help but grin like a complete idiot as the realization sunk in that Fareeha had promised to call her and made every indication that she was serious about that.

"YES!" She swiftly walked back through the doors, her lab coat fluttering a little behind her. She did not even hear the waiting people addressing her. She was going to have a date with Lieutenant Amari.

'With *Fareeha*,' she reminded herself on her way to her office. 'A date with *Fareeha*.'

((By the way, I rolled a 6))

**"Crap! I botched it again! That really can't be true!"*

Well, now it is Pharah's turn. Mercy wants a date - now where should Pharah take her?

~~Here is your poll!~~

Sorry for ending the poll so soon. Girlfriend and I looked at the results we had so far and then ran with the concept, throwing plot ideas around. Now I can't have the results change because then all of this concept would be gone, even though I really want to write it.

Here is the result:

- Well, Mercy asked for coffee. Give her coffee. 14%
- Take her out to dinner - but something fun and not fancy, like pizza! 15%
- Take her out to dinner - but go all out - fancy with sparkling wine and a rose on the table. 3%
- Take her to your badminton night so she can meet your friends and colleagues. 2%
- **Be unconventional. Take her to the fair. Ferris wheels and all, and shoot her a huge teddy bear. 37%**
- Get out of the city - you are both stuck here enough. Picnic time! 29%

Thank you for **126** votes!!

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Not exactly all I wanted to write (I am kinda busy right now), but you guys deserve your new chapter, right?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Of course the next few days were a little nerve-wrecking for poor Mercy. She was pretty sure that Fareeha would call, but there was always this tinge of doubt that no one could ever shake and every evening that passed without a call was another smidgeon on her little hill of worry. What if she had changed her mind?

On the fourth evening, the phone finally rang with an unfamiliar number. Mercy's heart leaped. She had only just gotten home and giddily dropped her coat on the floor just to pick up phone. It really was *her* – with that friendly smile in her voice and an apology for being very busy with paper work because apparently recovering police women got to catch up on all the office duties that other people had let slide.

She did have two tickets for the local fair, though, if Mercy wanted to go some time – and of course she did! As they were both pleasantly free of night shifts at this time (Mercy because she was head surgeon and Fareeha because she was still too injured for field work), they decided to go the next day right away. When Mercy hung up she was filled with excitement. She would see Fareeha so soon – finally, in a non-professional setting.

Pharah, on her end of the line, still could not quite believe what was happening here. Her friends really had a point saying that Dr. Ziegler was kind of out of her league in all respects. She had a top notch job with lots of responsibility and probably quite a paycheck, she was blond, blue eyed, sexy and obviously very intelligent. And yet here she was, Fareeha Amari, about to take her on a date because *somehow* that sexy doctor had taken an interest in her.

Of course she had not made it sound that way on the phone at all, but she had stood by the booth for the fair tickets for many minutes, debating whether or not to buy the tickets before calling Mercy. She had no idea what the woman expected from a date – maybe she was all for fancy dinners or long walks in the forest or checking out museums and art show. Maybe she really just wanted someone to chat over coffee for ten minutes taken out of her busy schedule and not spend a whole evening at a fair.

Captain Khalil had finally helped her decision by telling her she should probably do something she herself would enjoy or at least something that would not make her feel awkward. If Mercy did not like that, they maybe were not good for each other – and if she did, all the better. Pharah agreed tha the fair seemed like a good place for a start – it was public, there were lots of distractions, many things to laugh and talk about and certainly anything but boring. There would be food of all kinds and surely everyone going there could find at least something to enjoy. And if all worked out well, this would not be the last date. By next time, she'd probably already know more about what Mercy liked.

In the end, the phone call had gone considerably well and Pharah enjoyed a really good night of

sleep, looking forward to the next day with a positive and hopeful mindset. As she was falling asleep, she was still marveling over the fact that Dr. Angela Ziegler had asked her out – and how cute she had been when doing so. It was just a date for now and it seemed a bit difficult to even consider how this could potentially work out on the long run, but of course the thought crept up. Mercy was attractive in more than a physical way, but was she ‘girlfriend’ material?

Well, Fareeha Amari was on the best way to find out, wasn’t she?

When she finally did pick up Mercy from the hospital, as she had promised, the doctor looked so much like she had on the day when they had shared her wraps. She was in the neat, casual clothes she tended to wear under her lab coat, but without it, she looked charmingly young and pretty. Pharah got out of her blue and gold compact and greeted Mercy with a hug, feigning a little more confidence than she felt. Then she opened the door for her which Mercy acknowledged with a sweet smile.

Mercy waited for Fareeha to take the driver’s seat and start the engine before even attempting conversation. “Thank you for picking me up,” she began.

“No problem at all,” Fareeha assured her. “I am just sorry you didn’t catch a break after work yet. I hope it’s not too stressful?”

“I’m totally fine with that,” Mercy replied. “I like company after work. And I haven’t been to the fair in forever. It’s going to be fun!”

Pharah was so relieved – that sounded like she had made the right decision, unless Angela was just being friendly.

“So...” Mercy began with an air of curiosity. “‘Pharah’, is that what your friend said?”

Fareeha chuckled. “You are very attentive,” she acknowledged. “I’ve had that name for a while. The people I trained with when I first joined the police force claimed they made that up because of the Egyptian heritage ... but I am still *firmly* convinced that they just couldn’t remember my name. It stuck, of course.”

Mercy smiled. “I like it. Even though your name is not that hard to remember.”

“You’ve seen it written on your charts quite a few times, I would reckon. They only ever heard it at the beginning. I can see their struggle,” Pharah defended her former friends and partners. And on top of that, she liked that name as well.

“So what do I call you?”

“Anything you like.” She rethought that quickly. “As long as it is nice.”

Mercy laughed so very sweetly at that. “Pharah it is.” She looked out of the window, already seeing the large Ferris wheel looming over the city in a distance. It was getting darker and the lights from the fair were already bright against the sky. She was really looking forward to this – it was such an informal, easy thing to do. And after a serious work day, she was looking forward to the sounds, the scents and the lights... and sharing the lively atmosphere with someone nice and attractive.

They entered with the tickets that Pharah had bought the previous day, both feeling adventurous and excited. They decided to take a look around first, both not sure what different sections and attractions this fair had to offer. It turned out that a casual walk around was a very nice start to

their date. They easily found entertainment in pointing out little details here and there that they both enjoyed, sharing their fair-based likes and dislikes and laughing at the most ridiculous items for sale. Mercy surprised Pharah when it became evident that one of her goals of the day was to eat something so exceedingly unhealthy that the doctor in her would cringe with shock. She just seemed to take her time looking around before deciding what her treat was going to be.

As they passed one of the shooting booths, she ran her hand over a fluffy polar bear in passing. “Aw... look,” Mercy pointed out. “He’s got a heart for a nose.” She contemplated it, the big black eyes and the fluffy white fur, red paws pads and nose. It was seriously cute.

“Do you want it?” Fareeha asked, sensing her chance to shine.

“Oh... I—“ Mercy seemed a bit embarrassed. She could very well picture the big bear just at the top of her bed, looking corny but cute, fitting in with her red-and-white bedsheets and curtains. But then, she was not child anymore... “I suppose if I really want it, I can find it somewhere...”

Pharah was already reaching for her wallet, smirking. “That is not the same as someone winning it shooting it for you!”

“Oh! But everyone knows these guns are rigged!” Mercy protested. She did not want Pharah to embarrass herself through no fault of her own or spill her hard-earned money at charlatans.

The police woman just grinned. “So? Then it will take me one or two more shots to figure out how exactly the guns are rigged. Then I can compensate.” She approached the booth, looking the vendor in the eye. “How many points for the bear?”

“1250. You’ll find the points for everything you hit on the boards,” he said, sounding utterly bored. He gestured at the multiple little signs that indicated what each little plastic star, heart, moving bunny and disc on the spinning wheel was worth. Pharah figured that if she got the maximum number of shots per round, she could get the bear by taking down at least thirteen moving targets and one of the stars that popped up at random. That gave her two shots to waste. Tough, but feasible.

She bought the shots and took up the nearest rifle, trying to discern whether this one was more likely to veer to the left or the right, but it was impossible to tell. Mercy had, of course, swiftly made that same calculation about the points that Pharah had done and was estimating the probability of the Egyptian being good enough of a shot to hit that many points with a rigged rifle. She came out at a low probability, so she looked around and quickly added: “Those little koala bears are very cute as well!” Those were available for 800 points, which seemed more feasible.

Pharah chuckled to herself, noticing exactly what Mercy was doing. She aimed, feeling the trigger wriggle a little under her finger. She had an inkling that it would be hard to pull, then snap suddenly. Obviously, this cheap thing was nothing like a well-balanced police gun or rifle. She aimed at a bunny, but then changed her mind and moved on to a discs on the spinning wheel. Those were closer together and nailed to a metal wheel - it would more easily see where the shot would land in comparison to where she was aiming and give the individual secrets of the rifle away. Also, there was a stronger likelihood that even if missing, she’d hit one of the other discs on accident.

The first shot hit the metal behind the discs, just off to their left. As predicted, the trigger was anything but fun to play with. She aimed to the right of the another disc for her next shot and shattered it. A second disc went flying, then number three, four and five. Mercy watched and began to actually start feeling excited about that potential bear while Pharah, now confident with the trigger, took down three metal bunnies.

Next, a pop-up star had to take the shot, securing the koala for good. The owner of the booth bid Pharah to halt, having no expression whatsoever – neither positive for the skilled shooting, nor negative for the upcoming loss of one of his most precious and expensive prizes – and replaced the shattered disks. He replaced them with hearts, Mercy realized. She assumed that the idea behind that was that the hearts had a little less surface than the disks and were therefore harder to hit.

Pharah seemed to have realized this as well, but she took the challenge and specifically took down three hearts. 1070 points, three shots left. Another bunny keeled over – 1160. Another heart was shattered (just literally, though) and the bear was won, leaving Pharah one more shot that was completely superfluous.

She held out the rifle. “I guess this one is yours!”

“Oh no... I am no good at this, I couldn’t!” Mercy defended herself a little embarrassed.

Pharah grinned. “Come here, I’ll help you.” She looked for the biggest, stationary target in the booth – worth a meager 5 points. Hitting it would win them something as useful as a plastic pencil sharpener or a cheap hair tie in addition to their bear. But that wasn’t the goal, anyway.

Mercy did not want to be a spoil sport, so she came over and took up the rifle just as Pharah showed her she should. The large target – a triangle at the back of a shelf – was at a bit of an uncomfortable height, but manageable. Pharah leaned over Mercy, slipping her hands over the other woman’s to guide them to the right position. Hugged around her like that, she leaned close to her face, she gave her quiet instructions on how to aim and what to expect from the trigger – mostly that it would be a lot harder to pull than Mercy probably expected.

“You got the indicators lined up on the target?” she asked.

Mercy did not reply for a moment – mostly, because she had completely forgotten to aim in the first place. She had been more concentrated on the fact that her back was against Fareeha’s chest, her arms and hands touching Mercy’s and their cheeks close enough to touch. She really wondered whether that woman had any idea what this was doing to her – or whether, maybe, this was on purpose. They were on a date after all.

She caught up with her mistake and adjusted the rifle. At least for a moment, she could try and concentrate on the actual task at hand, however nice and distracting everything else was. “Okay... I think I got it.”

Pharah sent a brief glance at the booth operator, but she was busy helping two elderly women at the other end of the shooting stand. So Pharah used the chance to tell Mercy. “Now aim at the right edge of the triangle, not the center.”

Mercy shifted, then tried to pull the trigger, but the attempt of getting past the point where it would shoot made her accidentally move the rifle, so she stopped and adjusted, her arms starting to hurt a little from the uncomfortable position.

“Don’t anticipate anything – just pull the trigger like nothing’s going to happen.”

Mercy held her breath and pulled through, the gun giving a little jolt, the triangle gaining a distinct hole on its right side. She looked over to Pharah with an elated and surprised smile. “I hit it!”

“You did,” Pharah acknowledged, looking pleased with both herself and Mercy.

“1255 points,” the owner replied with the most bored voice anyone could possibly manage. “Please choose your prizes.”

Mercy grinned. "The polar bear!"

The man used a pole to unhook one of the bears from the top corner of the booth and then handed it to Mercy, who gave it a good squeeze. Pharah watched with much amusement and took the liberty to claim a 5-points orange hair tie for Mercy as well. Her attention shifted for a moment – to the other two women at the booth. The smaller one was aiming for the spinning wheel but she hit nothing. Twice in a row.

The taller woman, gray-haired but kind-looking, patted her back. She was wearing a cute little grandma hat.

"Maybe we can get one of the monkeys," she said. "Mary was also fond of monkeys, remember?" Her eyes, however, shifted to the same bear that Mercy was currently cuddling.

"I guess," the small woman said, aiming at a non-moving target instead - and hitting it. When she hit a second one, the other woman cheered. "See, you are awesome! As always! That's why I love you!"

In the end, the two older ladies managed to get a little blue elephant, ten points short of a monkey and about 600 short of a bear. The taller, gray-haired woman acted quite excited, but it was obvious her smaller counterpart was dismayed by the result. She dropped the rifle and turned to leave, frowning. Her partner was not having it.

"Darling! Maybe it's good we did not get that bear. It wouldn't be *hers*, right? Just a look-alike!" She stopped the other woman in her tracks and grabbed her by the shoulders, then gave her a big smooch on the lips. "And you are so, so wonderful for trying."

"I guess..." the other replied, not really cheered up.

Mercy glanced over to Pharah who had watched the whole exchange with her. She looked at the teddy she was cuddling and then back to the women, and then over to Pharah again. "Pharah... would you mind... I mean... they look like they need that bear way more than I do," she asked timidly.

Fareeha chuckled good-naturedly. Such kindness – and so sweet. She gently grabbed Mercy by the arm. "Come on, let's go make them happy."

They caught up with the older couple and Mercy gently tapped the shoulder of the small woman who had been shooting. "Excuse me, ma'am...!"

The woman turned around, staring right at the bear that Mercy was holding up next to herself. She was smiling. "I think this bear called your name just now... so I guess, I need to give it up for adoption."

The taller woman's eyes filled with tears right away. "Are you serious?!"

Mercy nodded. "I really don't know what to do with it," she lied. "And it looks like you do."

The small woman gently touched the bear's paw, looking slightly shocked. "Can we give you anything for it?" she offered with uncertainty. "Maybe for the shots you used on this?"

Mercy just pushed it into her arms while Pharah replied. "You can give us just one thing. We could not help but overhear so... we'd really like to know who Mary was."

The taller woman burst into a bright, moved smile, eyes still wet. "She was our German Shephard.

And our baby. She had a bear just like this one that she loved so much. We buried her with it and now we... well, we miss them both.”

Mercy’s heart wanted to melt at that. What a cute story and how lucky they were to be able to bring it to a nicer end. “I think the bear’s brother is in good hands now. Mary will enjoy seeing you care for him.”

The small woman who had done shooting said nothing, she was just hugging the bear tightly to herself, caressing its big paw in her hand like she could not believe just *how* fluffy it was.

“Thank you so much!” the taller woman said. “You are such good people. Bless you both!” Her eyes wandered between them, then took the arm of her partner. “We were just like that once, weren’t we, Lynn?” There was sweet affection in her voice – likely because she could see how happy her wife was, despite the silence. The bear-cuddling said it all.

Mercy gently tugged on Pharah’s arm, pulling her to leave the two women to their own devices. They had done their part and been well rewarded with tears and smiles and happiness. They bid the couple goodbye, took another load of thanks and then moved on to a different part of the fair.

“That was very kind of you,” Pharah noted.

“And of you – to ask them about Mary.”

Pharah grinned. “A dog. *Not* exactly what I expected, but sweet nevertheless.”

“Right?”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry, if the poll is a LITTLE lame. I might already have a few plans here. ;)

I assure you that the outcome of this will have *some* impact on the story, at least.

~~Where do they go next?~~

Poll closed with the following results:

The goat pen. 29%

The ferris wheel. 71%

Thank you for a 120 votes!

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

At this time point: Hello, neighbour, whoever you are, voting from the Frankfurt am Main area. XD Also, hello to all other fellow Europeans, especially the two Mercys in Switzerland!

According to your wishes, Mercy and Pharah will board the Ferris wheel next.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Mercy seemed pretty elated after the exchange with the two ladies and grabbed Pharah's wrist, pulling her down the path, zig-zagging around the other people. It amused Fareeha to be pulled like this and she found she liked Mercy's easy-going, confident character. She had not hesitated or reconsidered grabbing Pharah's arm like that, even though they had not put any sort of label on their relationship at this point. Maybe she was just naturally touchy and affectionate? In either case, it was enjoyable.

Shining lights flickered in front of them. "The Ferris wheel, really now?" Pharah laughed, seeing where she was being dragged.

"It's a fair! You can't leave without riding it." Angela stopped in her tracks and turned. "You are not scared of heights, are you?"

Pharah found that question very amusing - what a reminder about how much they still had to explore and learn about each other!

"Certainly not! I am *still* trying to become a jet pilot, actually. I just can't convince my bosses that the police might need one."

"Well, this," Mercy said, pointing at the giant Ferris wheel, "is the next best thing!"

"Uh-huh!" Pharah teased. "You know people just go on there to ride to the very top and kiss, right?"

There was a twinkle in Mercy's eyes as she replied: "Do they?" and then turned to the booth to purchase two tickets. Had all her nervousness from the day she has asked Pharah out flown away so quickly? Or did she just pretend, overcoming any reservations for the chance to flirt? It was a riddle worth exploring.

Pharah helped Mercy up the stairs and they waited until it was their turn to board. The blond medic peeked over the edge of the gondola as they slowly rose above the city, thinking about the people below. Somehow, it was both their realm down there. Pharah was chasing the criminals to protect the people. Mercy was there when the protecting did not work out too well or when

anything else happened that endangered the health of those walking among the shining lights below them.

“And what are you thinking?” Pharah asked, watching Mercy contemplate the city, her blond hair dancing a little in the wind.

“How the people in this city are something we both care for,” she replied. There were so many little moving dots down there at the fair – in all colors, shrinking as they rose higher step by step, stopping whenever more people boarded the Ferris wheel.

Pharah scooted closer, trying to look where Mercy did, both leaning comfortable on the banister of the gondola. “That’s the hospital, right?” she said pointing at a distance.

“Yes, somewhere over there. Where is your department?” Mercy wondered.

“Uhh...” Pharah looked around, trying to find her orientation. “I think in that direction,” she eventually decided, pointing east of the hospital.

“The park is so dark,” Mercy noted. It was a large black patch among all the city lights.

“Yes... and so many burglars are so aware of that,” Pharah commented. “Avoid it when it is dark, okay?”

Mercy turned, smiling at her with almost angelic sweetness. “Aw... you are worried about me.”

“Of course I am,” Pharah replied, slipping an arm around her shoulders. “This city needs its best surgeon, Dr. Ziegler. And I might need more dates.”

That was the first time that either of them had made any indication that this really could become more than it was at this moment. It made Mercy smile with hope and excitement. The Ferris wheel was no longer stopping – everyone had boarded. It was slowly ascending to the top, their gondola closing in on the apex.

The wind was picking up considerably and Mercy had trouble getting her bangs to stop whipping her in the face.

“Let me,” Pharah said, gently brushing them aside and holding them in place with a soft hand. So much physical contact... it felt exciting. Thanks to the many lights on the Ferris wheel itself, it was not too dark here, on top of the world. The colorful lights were reflected in Pharah’s eyes. Mercy looked closely, trying to discern where the pupils ended and the iris began. No wonder people thought that such dark eyes were so hard to read, if you could not even tell whether the pupils were narrowed or dilated. She liked a bit of mystery, though ... those reflections, like stars in a dark sky.

Pharah was a bit embarrassed by that close look, not quite understanding what Mercy was trying to do, but herself absorbed in the color of Mercy’s eyes. There was a soft, dark rim around the iris which Fareeha found especially beautiful. Other than that, they were of a bright color, shifting slightly in shade depending on what lights were switched on next to them on the Ferris wheel.

It took a moment before Mercy’s eyes shifted away, looking over to the criss-crossing bars that their gondola was passing. “We are at the top,” she noted quietly.

“Yes. And by convention and cliché and being on a date, I guess we have a duty?” There was a chuckle in Pharah’s voice.

“That’s what they’d tell you,” Mercy acknowledged. She scooted a bit closer, her gaze briefly

dropping to Pharah's lips. It did not take a genius to tell where this was going, Fareeha realized. But was it the right thing to do. Was it too forced, too unspectacular or maybe *too* spectacular?

She leaned just a tad closer, their lips almost touching. Her gaze searched for Mercy's to discern how much that meant to her and adjust accordingly.

"Mh," Mercy breathed out, but Pharah could not make anything of the brief sound or discern its meaning. The gondola was slowly passing through the apex, but they were not quite over it yet.

Well, it was time now, wasn't it? Pharah made a last move, when Mercy suddenly burst out laughing, turning away. Pharah could not help but laugh along with her, the weird tension suddenly falling off.

"Sorry!" Mercy exclaimed between giggles. "I just – I don't think I can do this – it's just a bit too – too---" she was still laughing.

"Corny?" Pharah grinned back.

"That's the word." The gondola began descending.

Pharah giggled as well. There were so many people in the world who would have been so *very* concerned about breaking this moment that so pre-destined for a potential first kiss. Pharah sure had been worried about messing this up! And here, Mercy was giggling, looking positive and confident, despite the odd situation. Pharah found she liked it.

"I agree," Pharah said, when Mercy's giggling had died down. "And this might really not be the best place for a kiss, given that this wheel is the second most deadly thing here." She patted the gondola for emphasis.

"Really?" Mercy wondered, intrigued. "I can say with certainty that I have never treated a Ferris wheel victim!"

"And you probably won't ever. A bee is more likely to kill people."

Mercy nodded with a bit of an impressed look. She *had* treated bee stings. A lot.

"Still, statistically, this thing is more dangerous than a water slide. But not as dangerous as a roller coaster, I give it that."

"So we have to do the roller coaster next, for the thrill of a minimal potential for lethal injury?" Mercy suggested with a grin.

"Maybe the animal exhibits would be a bigger thrill, then," Pharah chuckled. "Really, these giant machines are ridiculously safe. I mean, there are hundreds of rollercoasters and Ferris wheels everywhere, and they can't even manage to kill 30 people in a year."

Mercy gave her a very curious and slightly disbelieving look. "Do you know all the statistics, really?"

Pharah returned a guilty grin. "I might have looked up some things to impress you."

Mercy's next objective was to find food. Pharah noticed that the woman had essentially taken the lead over the date. She did not mind at all, happily following along and enjoying Mercy's excitement. She got increasingly more confident that she had made the right decision inviting the

young doctor to this place over any other. It was also quite impressive how lively she was after a day of work, running around the grounds.

“Oh!” Angela exclaimed suddenly, looking completely distracted from her food-finding mission. She was pointing over to huge tent with a broad entrance. “Look how cute!” She was positively gushing.

“What? The goats?” Pharah wondered, crinkling her nose. She could smell the animals – a strong stench that surely took a lot of getting used to. It did not seem to deter Mercy, though.

“They have kids! Look at those cute little horns!” she fawned, let go of Pharah and made her way over. Pharah frowned. The farm animals, really? Oh well, it was a date, she had smelled worse things in her career. Far worse. And she could not help but enjoy Mercy’s excitement. She followed the doctor into the large tent.

Mercy was already kneeling by the pen with the goat kids, reaching through the bars and petting a brown-and-white patched little goatling right between the horns. The little thing tried to snatch at her fingers, hoping she was bringing something to eat. The sloppy lick from the insolent goat-tongue made her giggle.

Pharah stood by her side, one arm on the bars and watched her enjoy herself, waiting patiently. She tried to ignore the smell and just observed the antics of the goats inside the pen, playfully fighting each other and jumping over a huge log and on top of a little house that was in the middle. They were kind of cute, she had to admit. She assumed there was nothing to climb on near the edges of the pen because the goats would have made a quick escape.

“You can go inside,” said a voice behind them. “If you want to pet them.” It was an older man in flap trousers with a shirt in a red and black plaid-pattern and rubber boots – the very picture of a farmer from a kid’s book.

Mercy did not have to be told twice. She immediately opened the door and slipped inside, while Pharah declined politely. She could do without goats trying to eat her jacket. Mercy did not seem to mind that her date stayed behind, sat on the log and tried to pat five kids at once. Their weird, horizontal pupils were seizing her for a moment, before one of them jumped onto the log behind her and nipped on her ponytail.

“Hey, you!” she laughed, pulling it free and gently pushing the goat off. “It may look like straw, but it sure isn’t!”

Pharah noticed one of the animals had stuck his head out through the bars somewhere behind Mercy and was trapped between the bars, bleating and pulling uncoordinatedly. She tried to get her date’s attention, but it seemed the goats were more lucky in that respect. So she decided she might as well go herself, entered the goat pen and tried to free the little thing with her hands trying to direct the coarse head.

The little billy was insanely stubborn, not turning his head the way Pharah needed him to, so she could pull it out between the bars without the little horns getting in the way. “Come on... I am trying to help you!” she told the goat, but to no avail.

She did not notice that Mercy had walked over and was watching her. Finally, Pharah decided the deed required a little more force and less gentleness, and she pushed the little goat’s head down, then pulled it backwards by the horns. It bleated angrily trying to wrestle its head free from her grip.

As soon as the goat was out of the bars, Pharah let go of it and stepped back, letting it run away

from her. The goat retreated, backwards, behind the length of the log in the center of the pen.

Pharah and Mercy watched it, trying to figure out whether the trap it had been in had hurt it in some way, maybe confused it or made it dizzy. After all it was walking backwards and staring at Pharah and that seemed kind of odd.

The little goat stopped eventually and reversed its direction, jumping onto the log, putting its head down and charging at his savior.

“Ooph!” Pharah breathed out as the little horns hit her right in the stomach. “You ungrateful little bastard!”

“Fareeha, your stitches!” Mercy yelled out in shock. Pharah had not thought about those at all, but technically, one of the horns had either hit or nearly hit a scar that was just a few days old. It did not hurt much, though, and she did not feel concerned. While the goat had taken a good charge at her, it wasn’t exactly very strong enough to cause damage and its tiny horns weren’t able to pierce through Pharah’s shirt or jacket, either.

Yet, Mercy was freaking out a little. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine, no harm done!”

“Let me see,” she replied, rushing over and grabbing Pharah’s shirt.

“Hey, you are not going to undress me right-“ she attempted to protest, but her shirt was already lifted. Mercy was laying a gentle hand on the over-sized band aid that covered the scar and pushed it against the skin to see whether it was soaking up any blood. She could feel the knots of the thread beyond the surface, but everything remained dry and stayed a clean white. There were two red marks appearing on those very nice abs, marking the impact of two tiny goat horns – but they were not on the scar.

Pharah could not quite make up her mind whether Mercy touching her abs was nice or whether Mercy touching the knots on an ugly scar was kind of unattractive. In the end, she was just glad when Mercy let go of her shirt and she could pull it back into place. She wasn’t exactly shy, but she also did not think it too awesome to stand with her front exposed in a goat pen.

Mercy turned around, seeking for the pesky goat that had tried to pierce her date. “You! You come and apologize!” She snatched the small billy up and he immediately made an attempt to eat her blond bangs.

“That’s okay, he was scared,” Pharah tried to evade any more goat-encounters when the pesky little thing was dropped into her arms. Then she stood there with her arms hooked about it, trying to keep it from slipping, even though it was moving in her arms.

“What if he pees on me?” Pharah worried. “Or poops?!”

Mercy was very amused by how awkwardly the police woman stood there, a wary eye on the goat who now was looking rather comfortable and began licking the zipper on Fareeha’s jacket. Apparently the little billy enjoyed the massage of the zipper’s teeth against his tongue. He looked utterly content now, despite wanting to pierce that same woman only moments ago. Pharah looked anything but content.

She sent Mercy a displeased little look. “And what purpose does this serve?” she wondered, indicating at the goat in her arms.

“Immobilizing you, of course,” Mercy grinned.

“And why do you need me immobilized?” She was not sure how to drop the goat. Would it just land on its feet like cat? Or did she need to put it down gently?

“So I can do this!” Mercy got onto her toes and surprise-kissed Pharah on the cheek.

“Oh!” Pharah puffed out in surprise while the goat finally discovered the beads in her hair and tried to munch on them. “Looks like you serve a purpose, after all,” she told the pesky animal. She tried to turn her head away to free her hair and beads from the goat teeth and the saliva. Mercy giggled, enjoying the display.

“Really, what do I do with this thing?!” she wondered eventually, the goat beginning to slip in her arms.

The doctor eventually did show some mercy and took the goat from Pharah to put it back on its feet. A gentle slap on its butt sent the beast on its way. Apparently it had realized that whatever the two women were doing in the pen, feeding them was not their intention. That made them far less interesting.

Pharah dusted the goat hair off her jacket, looking a tad embarrassed now, after she was freed of her nibbling load of goat, and realized how awkward she must have seemed only moments earlier.

“Maybe we should look at something less touchy next?” Mercy suggested. “Roosters maybe?” She was holding a whole herd of goats back with a shepherd’s skill as she opened the door for Pharah, then followed her out of the pen without any of the horned little monsters escaping.

Pharah shrugged, glad to be leaving the hell pit of tiny pointy horns. “Anything that won’t bite me,” she agreed. Why didn’t they just have puppies at these places? Mercy would probably have gushed over them as well, but they would have been much more fun to play with.

She had not the slightest inkling just how much Mercy had enjoyed that moment.

The rest of the evening went by with less awkwardness and more pleasantries. Mercy eventually decided on eating a lot of fried things – including fried *coffee* – that was basically coffee-drenched, fried doe - and got a bite of Pharah’s hot dog as well.

A roller-coaster ride and a lost moment in a glass-labyrinth later, the women were both laughing and enjoying themselves. However, it was getting late and the fair would soon be closing. As they left the grounds, they were discussing the couple they had given the teddy bear to and dwelling on other newly formed memories. The evening was warm and pleasant and there were smiling people all around them.

“Do you have your car at the hospital, or shall I take you home?”

“I left it at home this morning, knowing you’d pick me up.” It was the truth, though just knowing she’d be picked up was not the only reason she had decided on going to work by bus.

“Ah, okay. Just give me directions, then,” Pharah demanded and – again – opened the door for Mercy before getting into the car herself. It had been such a nice evening – too bad it was ending. That was the shared regret of both women, even though they did not know it of each other.

Mercy gave her directions, leading Pharah on a twenty-minute ride away from the fair and into more wide-spread areas. The houses were getting bigger with every turn and were placed further and further apart. Mercy was not living *here*, was she?

“To the left,” the doctor instructed, leading them into a cul-de-sac. “Aaaaand... stop right here.”

“Wait... where now?” Pharah said looking around, but stopping obediently. There was a two-story white brick house with a nicely curved black metal fence to their left. The garden lay in darkness, though little lights were illuminating the driveway up to the garage. On the other side of the street was a red brick-building with a wooden balcony, neatly trimmed bushes and a well-cared for lawn.

Mercy gestured at the white building to their right. “Right here,” she clarified.

“Whoa?! What?” Pharah could not help but exclaim. “That’s yours?” She leaned over to peek through the window on the passenger’s side to see it better. It looked like there was a huge glass door and window beyond the balcony on the top floor. Pharah thought of her small, rented apartment in the inner city where the only reason she had a garage was so nobody would *steal* her car.

Mercy watched Fareeha Amari’s shocked surprise with a tinge of pride, a tinge of amusement and a handful of worry. “I am head surgeon, I have no children and no family to take care of,” she explained, trying to smile. “But I realize I went a little over the top there.”

“No – not at all – it’s really nice!” Pharah assured her quickly. “It’s just so unfathomable that you are what you are – I mean –” She realized she was walking on thin ice here because she had no idea what she should say to make this sound anything but stupid. It was true that Angela looked, felt and seemed way too young for what she was, but she could hardly barge in and ask the woman for her exact age.

Mercy just smiled at her. “I get that a lot, don’t worry,” she assured her. “There is an explanation for that, if it helps,” she offered. “I skipped fifth and ninth grade, pushed through university in six years – so I basically had a head start.”

Pharah cleared her throat, digesting this information. “That is quite some explanation,” she replied, sounding quite impressed. She realized that was either on a date with a really hot genius or a well-function psychopath. She hoped it was the former, even though it was almost too good to be true. She needed to gather herself back together, however. There was no point in being struck with awe when it came to someone you intended to have a mutual relationship with.

Mercy concealed that for all the joy she found in her beautiful house, she would much rather have had a family to care for. Because she had started so very young, her life seemed to have already run on endlessly without any of that. She wasn’t unhappy – but she was aware that there were things she might have liked a little more than what she did have. This was not the moment to contemplate this, though. Her primary concern was that this not entirely accurate presentation of success was not going to discourage her date. It would not have been the first time, which was why Mercy had intentionally tried to lead Fareeha here. If this was going to end – again – over this financial discrepancy, she wanted to know before she’d throw her heart away. She had learned better than to try anything else. “Ignore it,” she said. “I thought I should maybe rent it out, use it as a capital asset and move to some place---” She stopped herself as she realized mentioning that she could technically buy another house (even if it would bear a certain amount of financial risk) was not exactly making this any better. “I mean, I thought about moving some place with more sociable neighbors and more chats over the fence.”

Pharah had already caught herself, realizing that Mercy could have been poor as a rat and she’d still be attractive and fun, self-confident and – occasionally – adorable. It did, in fact, not make a difference. Rather the opposite – she was here, having a posh little place, and did not seem like the type of person for that at all. “So, is a second date in order?” Pharah asked before things could get

any more awkward.

Mercy smiled, her relief evident. "I'm up for it."

"So am I," Pharah replied. "But now it is your turn."

"I figured it would be."

"Do you have my phone number, though?" She pushed her seat back to see Mercy better as she turned towards her. It was dark in the car, but there was a street lamp nearby that helped her see Mercy's pretty face.

"It should be in the recent caller list, I suppose," Mercy mused. She, in fact, had forgotten to save it – or maybe thought it had not been right yet to do so. She had been worried that Pharah would back out, after all.

Fareeha held out her hand. "Give me your phone, I'll just save it – and I'll add my address and email."

Mercy could *hardly* admit that she had memorized that data weeks ago in the hospital, staring at Fareeha Amari's file and debating with herself whether to totally ignore hospital policy and contact her privately. So she reached into her bag, unlocked her phone and handed it to Fareeha, who eagerly began typing in her contact information.

There was a space in the contact list, titled "Company/Description/Info".

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, like I was gonna give you that kiss, people! XD

So, what *did* Pharah write as a description of herself in Mercy's contact list?

~~Vote here!~~

The poll has been closed with the following results:

"Pharah" 25%

(girlfriend) 6%

(future girlfriend) 7%

<3 5%

(really wants a second date) 17%

(still need to kiss her :-*) 33%

Thank you for 88 votes!

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“There you go,” Pharah said, handing the phone back to Mercy.

She thanked her and looked over, smiling. “I had a great day today, Fareeha. Thank you. It’s been a while since I had so much fun.”

“So did I. I am glad you liked the idea.” She was wondering what was going to happen now. They had already agreed on a second date and they had exchanged gratitude and pleasantries for the past few hours. Now the moment was lingering in the air with nowhere to go. Mercy pulled her bag into her lap and let the phone slide inside, then dug out her keys. Pharah wondered whether she should take Mercy to the door or whether that was too much since she would be entering her property.

Mercy, however, just leaned over and pecked Pharah on the lips. “I’ll call you. Have a good night.”

Fareeha enjoyed the sweet little gesture. “You, too!” Then Mercy got out, waving one last time before walking onto her property.

Pharah waited until Mercy had walked up the path to the impressive house, unlocked the door and disappeared inside to make sure she was all safe and good. Then she started the engine, feeling oddly elated and very hopeful. Even though Mercy had been the one who had asked *her* out, she wasn’t carelessly stumbling into this. They were taking things a bit slower than Pharah had expected. It was both a little nerve-wrecking and utterly sweet. A kiss on the lips, in that light, seemed like a step forward.

As she stopped at red light, Pharah leaned back, sighing with a feeling of true, happy satisfaction. She knew she wasn’t supposed to, but the light was not going to turn too soon, so she fished for her phone and opened the photos section. There was Mercy, stepping out of the glass labyrinth. One swipe and she was holding up something fried and unhealthy. And then the both of them – a badly shot selfie, right in front of the Ferris wheel. Pharah looked a little too much like she was concentrating on taking that photo while Mercy was all smiles.

She chose the photo of Mercy and her fried bit as a caller ID for the doctor. What a beautiful smile.

It took Mercy two days to call, leaving Pharah wondering and waiting with anticipation until the image of Mercy finally popped up on her phone. She could not wait for a time when their relationship was – hopefully – close enough that calling anytime was totally fine. She would have called Mercy already in that case, if only for a chat.

“Good evening!” Pharah greeted cheerfully.

“Oh, is it so late already? Time flies!” Mercy replied, leaning against her office desk, a hand in her big lab coat pocket.

“Is that why you did not already call me yesterday?” Pharah teased.

Mercy chuckled. “Actually, I didn’t because I had to clear some things up for our date,” she replied with not even a hint of guilt in her voice.

“Oh? Now that sounds interesting!” Pharah raised an eyebrow. What kind of plans was the woman making for them that it required such preparation?

“Mmh... but, I need you for a whole day. Saturday, if possible.” That sounded even more intriguing. Those couple of hours with Mercy at the fair had been very pleasant. A whole free day with her would be quite a treat. Luckily, Pharah had no shifts this weekend and so they easily scheduled their date just as Mercy had hoped they would.

There was a short pause as both of them noted the time and location for the beginning of their date down – and afterwards, both women had things they wanted to bring up. Mercy had not missed the note in her phone’s address book and Pharah wanted to try and coax more information about that mystery date out of Mercy.

Before either of them could get to that, there was an odd sound coming from Mercy’s pocket – a quiet, digital beeping of three different tones.

“I’m sorry. That’s my beeper. I have to go down to the ER,” Mercy apologized, grabbing her office keys in a hurry.

“Oh, okay!” Pharah replied.

“Sorry, gotta run - see you Saturday!” She hung up before Pharah could reply anything else – but who could blame her?

Still, it displeased Fareeha that this should be all their contact until Saturday morning. It was too long until then for such a new start, too easy to get back into the habits of someone who was single with no prospective partner in sight. Maybe it was an odd way of thinking and worrying – maybe she really just wanted to see Angela again. In any case, Saturday was way too far off. She decided could not let the days pass by like that.

Mercy *hated* Thursdays with a passion. She had set this day aside for office-work even before she had become head surgeon. A long time ago, she had thought this would be a great idea – she would take a break in the middle of the week, knowing the floors were staffed enough that her work as a surgeon was not required – and calmly sit down and take care of all the paper work. That was the romanticized version of her plan. Reality, as it turned out, was a bit different.

For starters, Thursday was *not* enough. She was still doing more paper work throughout the week, whenever she had a moment. And then, most of what she ended up doing was just boring and annoying, but important. Some days, she would have given her right arm to go back downstairs and pull nails out of clumsy wannabe home-improvers. So what she had originally set up as a gift to herself – a break from practical work - had turned into a much disliked duty that she forced herself through out of sheer responsibility.

Shift plans, funding, overseeing reports, not to mention the correspondence with the companies that sold machines and pharmaceuticals and needed to set up trials under her supervision. Then she had to be up-to-date about procedures and medical progress, consult with those colleagues she had a good connection with for mutual benefit and check the evaluations of their residents, nurses-in-training, distribute new rules and information to her staff, and so on... Yes, this place had secretaries and other doctors with a respectable amount of responsibility, and she had indeed delegated a lot of tasks to other people already. But in the end there were enough things only she

could have the last word on.

She eyed her cellphone on the table. Wouldn't it be nice to call Pharah... just for a chat... after their last one had ended so abruptly because of an emergency? She had never found the time to call back. Technically, she did not have time now, either – not if she was going to act responsibly.

She called up her phone's address book and scrolled just a little to reach 'Amari'. She smiled, seeing the description again: '(still need to kiss her :-*)' that Fareeha had put into her phone. She had meant to tease the other woman about it, but then their phone call had been cut short. It was true – they had not really kissed yet. On the cheeks, yes. On the lips – just a peck. The right situation somehow had not come up, at least for Mercy's taste. She was not one to waste a good moment out of impatience.

Now she wondered whether they should both have gotten out of the car that night. In the soft evening breeze in front of her home, lit by a yellow street lamps, leaning against the little blue-and-gold car, it could have been the right moment... But for all her dreaming, that had not happened.

'Oh, I do want to kiss you...' she thought. Her finger hovered over the little symbol of a telephone receiver. It would be irresponsible... but...

She sent a guilty look to the papers on her desk. 'No, I can't. I won't be home until late if I don't keep to this...' she told herself, regretting her own sense of responsibility in that same moment.

She sent a last, longing glance to that phone, spared a last, longing thought on a kiss that had not happened, and opened the file before her, hoping that she could somehow stay focused – but doubting it.

She managed to go through a small bit of her work when her office desk phone rang. The number revealed it was an internal call from inside the hospital. She picked it up, putting her smile in place. The hospital staff knew they could contact her any time.

"Dr. Ziegler here," she replied cheerfully. It was the front desk, asking her to come downstairs because the police were there, demanding her attention.

Mercy told the receptionist that she would be there in a moment, thankful for the distraction from her paper work. It was not too rare that this or that doctor was asked about the results of accidents or about an assessment concerning the harm of a patient. Sometimes, they blatantly brought in criminals – which did not matter because patients were the same to Mercy, anyhow. How they'd be watched and where they would go after treatment was not her business. Helping people was her business. While this was usually really annoying – often because she was asked things she was not at liberty to disclose and it annoyed the police – today the distraction was more than welcome.

She slipped into her lab coat, locked her office door and swiftly took the stairs down to the hospital entrance, wondering which recent case could potentially be of police interest. She had not had a reason to scan anyone for drugs lately or suspect domestic violence – but then, whatever this was about could as well be something her staff had been working on, or something new that the police had just brought in.

She approached the front desk and stopped in her tracks. "Fareeha?!" Was that a coincidence?

She was greeted with a smile. "Hello, Mercy! I'm on break – I thought I'd see whether you are around," she explained right away, not wanting to worry Angela that anything had happened.

‘Grundgütiger...’

Pharah noticed that Mercy’s steps slowed down considerably upon seeing her and she could not make sense of it. “Are you alright?” she asked, feeling confused.

“You- you are in uniform,” Mercy stated, the words not wanting to come out right. Indeed - Pharah was in a dark blue shirt with silver buttons and long sleeves that bore the logo of her police department. The black leather belt around her hips held a gun on one side and a radio and a set of handcuffs on the other. The thick pants were fitting to the shirt in color and perfectly tailored to her figure.

Her appearance grabbed Mercy at her weakest point, filling her with absolutely uncalled for nervousness. She wondered whether it was just the case that police women were trained and therefore looked just nice in anything, or whether uniform pants were purposely made in such a way that a well-shaped behind would stand out at all times.

Farreeha was still confused, that statement from Mercy not helping. “Of course I am in uniform - I have to get back to my duty later...” She looked at Mercy’s face, realization dawning on her. “Oh!” Her confusion turned into a bemused grin and she confidently walked over, standing right before Mercy, just a tad taller.

Mercy’s took a deep breath, looking up at her, her cheeks a little redder than Pharah had ever seen them before.

“I see,” Pharah smirked. “Someone likes that uniform. I admit I am a little disappointed that this is why you asked me out,” she teased.

Mercy cleared her throat quietly, trying to pull herself out of the mindset of a teenager with a heavy crush – but being called out on her reaction only made things worse. Especially when it was by the person of her interest in a moment when she looked especially gorgeous. She could have sworn Pharah looked taller now, certainly older and also slightly intimidating. An air of authority seemed to surround her and it made poor Angela a little weak in the knees. “I—you know that is not true,” she brought out.

Pharah grinned, still amused by that strong reaction. “Maybe,” she admitted. “But... maybe I’ll finally get that kiss now?” It seemed her attire was a very convincing argument to give this a shot. She put a gentle hand on Mercy’s waist, admitting to herself that she actually felt a little more confident *because* she was in her work clothes. Not like it mattered – what mattered instead was that Mercy had lost *her* confidence that the sight of this. It opened a whole new chapter in their relationship so far, and a bunch of possibilities.

Mercy stood frozen there with Pharah’s hand on her waist, looking up into those mesmerizing dark and mysterious eyes. She was *this* close to just leaning up and living that sexy dream of a kiss – all of it: Her hands on the uniform, up on her toes to reach Pharah’s lips a little better, playing the passive role while that gorgeous woman would confidently take over her lips and then her mouth... but... her gaze shifted to the chairs beyond the receptionist desk and the people there.

“Pharah... there are patients here...!” she sighed, most of all regretting this herself. She could not be seen smooching a police woman in front of sick people waiting for help and expecting her to dutifully run the department that would give it to them.

Pharah sighed with fake exasperation and withdrew her hand. “You know you are killing me, right?” she said, but her tone was kind and friendly.

She received a guilty and equally regretful frown in return. “There is a right time for everything, I

suppose?” She did not even sound convinced.

Pharah decided to regard this reaction as an apology and accepted it. She threw a glance at the clock on the wall above the receptionist desk and wondered whether she could convince Mercy to take her to her office for a moment where there were no patients... but her break was almost over and Khalil was waiting outside, munching on a hot dog she had bought for him to allow her to do this.

“I hope that right time will stop by Saturday, then,” Pharah replied. She wondered when she had last had such a hard time getting a kiss.

“Potentially,” Mercy smiled coyly, finding a bit of that old confidence again, despite the nerve-wreckingly sexy attire of the woman in front of her.

“Where are you taking me?” Pharah prodded, since she had not gotten to do so last time.

“That’s going to be a surprise.”

“Not even a hint?” Pharah pouted. “A little one?”

Mercy chuckled. “No, not even a little one,” she denied the request.

“Not even if I tell you that I will have to go right now, if you don’t give me a little hint?” That was a lie of course – she had to go either way.

“Ah... then I think you might have to go. What a pity,” Mercy just replied, slowly getting out of the daze that Pharah in her uniform had put her in.

“Aaaalright, *Dr. Ziegler*. I’ll see you Saturday, then.” Pharah took a step back as if to leave, wondering whether it would have any impact – but Mercy did not spill her secrets. Even when Pharah turned, waved and made for the door, Mercy stayed where she was, smiling and watching her leave.

Pharah shrugged bemusedly and waved one last time before she stepped through the sliding doors. Mercy watched her through the glass, walking down the little path to a waiting police car.

Little did she know that she might as well have kissed Pharah here in the front hall – any one of the patients that were not too preoccupied with other things just had to look at the way the medic in her lab coat was staring at the police woman’s well-defined behind to figure that the doctor really enjoyed that view. She was an open book at that moment and did not even realize it.

Khalil, however, did. And for the time it took for him and his lieutenant to get back to their route, Pharah was in for a lot of teasing.

Chapter End Notes

Please make a choice in ~~this poll~~!

Mysterious, isn't it? :)

The poll has been closed with the following result:

Helicopter. 16%

Airbus 380. 1%

F-35. 43%

Cessna. 39%

Thank you for 240 votes!

Dear poll-maker, why does this add up to only 99%???

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

You chose the F-35. :) Alright, people!

Sorry for updates coming a little more slowly. My new job has me spending a lot of nights in hotels and inside my work car. I cannot use my work laptop to write and additionally bringing my personal laptop will just become too much luggage at this time. Not to mention that the first gift my new colleagues gave me was a nasty cold that had me sleeping every free second in those hotels.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Saturday morning found Fareeha Amari and Dr. Angela Ziegler in a much fancier car than Pharah's, driving almost all the way out of the city. Pharah was nagging and poking Mercy for more information on where they were headed, attentively studying signs by the road for any clues.

Mercy's lips were sealed, though she did voice her worries that she had kept Pharah in such suspense, she might expect something way more grand and spectacular than she had planned and would end up disappointed. That toned Pharah's prodding down a little since she did not want to increase that worry. In reality, it did not matter what they were going to do. The suspense was the good part – and the fact that Mercy had decided to make their date a surprise in the first place. It was a nice idea and Fareeha loved it.

The landscape got wider and flatter when Mercy left the highway and steered her fancy car away from the big road signs and advertisements. All that Pharah knew to be out there was some military base or airport or something like that. It was shortly after she remembered it that she spotted an advertisement for an airshow with the current date printed on it. Realization dawned on her.

"Oh! Is that where we are going?" She had meant to ask with casual interest (just in case they weren't), but it came out *way* too excited.

"Mmh-mh," Mercy confirmed, feeling she was unable to deny it just to keep Pharah in suspense for even longer. "You mentioned you wanted be a jet pilot, right? I remembered this was going to happen and I thought taking you there might be a good idea?" She felt a little jolt of happiness, despite her very composed words – Pharah's reaction to spotting the sign was actually all she had needed to confirm to her that she had made the right choice in many ways.

And even if she had needed any more confirmation, she got that at the show itself. Pharah was excitedly telling her everything she knew about the F-35 Lightning II planes that were parked on the runway, cut off from the audience that was getting ready for the show with food and drinks, sunglasses and hats. Mercy wasn't too interested in the details, but Pharah's excitement was quite catching and so she listened and asked a few questions and enjoyed the smile she had managed to bring to her date's face.

The show itself was loud, fast, exciting, a little scary and very, very impressive. “They can easily break the sound barrier!” Pharah screamed over the noise of the engines. “I wonder what that feels like!”

“I figured!” Mercy yelled back, sipping from her cup and watching the jets go by, colorful stripes of smoke following in their wake.

“The pilot has a computer *in* the helmet that gives information about what’s around and even under the jet! It’s a super-light, custom-made and super-expensive thing!” The excitement was pouring out of Pharah so obviously, it was adorable. Her eyes were lit up with joy, her posture alert and attentive and she was too distracted to drink or eat, even though they had gotten themselves some unhealthy festival food. Somehow this kind of eating was already becoming a theme with them and Mercy thought that if she did not want to get super fat, she would have to think of more healthy dates in future.

“What would you do if you could get near one of the F-35s?” Mercy asked. She tried to look every bit like she was just making conversation.

Pharah thought about this as the jets flew off again into the distance to form up for their next little maneuver. The air was a little less noise-filled for a moment. “I’d probably be scared I’d get arrested if I touched it. They don’t even tell you everything about these planes because it’s all so secret.”

Mercy smirked. “Good point...”

“Thank you, Angela! That was so amazing!” Pharah swooned as they got up from their seats and tried to follow the flow to the exits of the grandstand. Mercy was walking in front and Pharah used the noise of the surrounding voices and her closeness to Mercy as an excuse to lay a hand on her date’s hip and lean close enough to her ear to be heard. “Can we go down to the ground and just stand by the barrier – where they are parked?” she begged. She really wanted to take a close look and maybe catch a glimpse of the pilots and their gear and the mechanics that would undoubtedly check up on the planes right now.

Maybe she could spot the docking part for the nozzle that was used to refill the jets in mid-air. Or maybe, if she was really lucky, one of them would be open to sneak a glimpse into the cockpit from afar? And even if she could just sneak a peek at the helmets that were custom-made for each pilot that would already be pretty awesome!

Mercy smiled to herself, enjoying both Pharah’s hand on her hip and her request. The most direct way to the parked jets was down the stairs and onto the ground, then off to the east near the food stands and merchandise. But it was not where Mercy intended to go. “Mh... can we stop by the bathroom before?” she requested.

“Oh, of course!” As excited as she was, Pharah was aware that the jets would not go anywhere for a while and she could tame her excitement enough to give Mercy any break she wanted. She followed her down the steps and to the other side of the grandstand. Mercy, however, took a turn long towards the field, quite a bit before the restrooms and approached the banister by the landing strip.

A small crowd was gathered there, chatting up a pilot that had veered away from the jets for the time being. It was sweet of Mercy to take that little detour to enable Pharah to join the conversation, delaying their bathroom break. She decided that she would try to keep it short, just in case Mercy’s bladder was about to burst or something.

Mercy walked to the left of the crowd, leaned her arms onto the banister and watched the pilot for a while with Pharah right by her side. He was answering questions and exchanging some jokes with the little crowd in front of him, sipping from a water bottle every now and then. Pharah noticed he was tall, a little grayed out, and looked like a seasoned pilot. The F-35 Lightning II likely was not the first, second or third plane in his career.

His small eyes eventually spotted them there, by the banister - or at least, he could not escape the brightness of Mercy's blond hair and big blue eyes. She had a way of standing out in crowds somehow.

"Excuse me for a moment," he said to his audience, leaving the crowd standing there and coming over to them instead. "Angela! You made it!" he greeted her cheerfully. Pharah stared at him, then Mercy, feeling a mixture of surprise and excitement. Mercy had not mentioned she had some connections here.

"Hi there, Thomas. Thanks for the tickets," Angela replied, stretching up some over the banister to receive a hug. "How are you doing?" she continued.

"Perfect! You probably heard all of it from Lizzy already," he replied with a good-natured rumble of happiness in his voice. "But the baby is comin' along just well!"

Mercy laughed. "I know that much! And that it's going to be your first girl..."

"I see, there is nothin' I can tell you..." His eyes then fell on Pharah who was dumbstruck with awe and nearly unable to stand straight against meeting the man's gray eyes. Oh goodness - an F-35 pilot! Thomas did not seem to notice Pharah's nervousness. "That's your date, Angela, huh?" He pinpointed and held out a hand. "I'm Thomas, don' give a damn about the rank. Nice to meet you."

"F-fareeha Amari. It is an *honor* to meet you," she brought out, but barely.

Mercy grinned at that overdone nervousness.

"Angela saved my life," Thomas explained. "Any friend of hers is my friend as well, Fareeha." He had no trouble remembering the name. Pharah smiled and returned his tight grip on her hand, her mind wondering momentarily if Mercy was truly allowed to take any sort of benefit or advantage from someone she had saved. As a police woman, she herself certainly wasn't allowed to take such advantage. But these tickets... did those even count?

"Well, this way, ladies," Thomas added, walking them two steps over to a small gate that he opened for them. Pharah was a little surprised and curious as to what was happening here. They stepped through, now standing just a hundred steps away from the landing strip with no barrier to stop them. The air above the jets that were parked a little walk to their left was distorted with the heat from the cooling engines.

Thomas said a proper goodbye to his little crowd of admirers before joining the two women again. He looked directly at Pharah. "Wanna see her?"

"See whom?" Pharah wondered, utterly confused.

"The F-35. I know *Angela* doesn't care, but she mentioned you might."

"Oh... is that- is that alright?" Pharah couldn't quite grasp what she was offered. She might actually get close to the big bird and have a good look?! She wouldn't have dreamed of it before.

"I do care," Angela protested. Thomas gave her a raised-eyebrow look. "A *little*," she added.

Thomas walked ahead and Pharah took a step closer to Mercy, whispering: "Should we be doing this?"

"Whyever not?"

"I mean, that's – isn't that taking benefits from a patient...?"

A beat passed in which Mercy gave Pharah the oddest of looks, then burst out laughing. It made Thomas turn around and Pharah stood at odds with herself, but with an inkling that for some reason, she should be embarrassed.

"I already know my hairline is receding," Thomas commented on Mercy's laughter.

"You should tell Fareeha how I saved your life, I think," Mercy suggested once her laughter had died down. "I think she believes I gave you my kidney or something. Or at least someone else's!"

That amused him and he waited for them to catch up with him. "I'd take your kidney, but not back then. Not saying you didn't know what you were doing, but I would not have trusted you to cut me open back then. That's been how many years now? 20?"

Mercy pouted. "I am no *that* old. 15 at most!"

"Fine. 15 then. I lost my wife – tragic story... had a genetic heart condition and the doctors kept her livin' for as long as she could, but she was never meant to live long," he explained. "I was so devastated – you know, I had spent so much time with her, never dared to have kids because it could hurt her, but of course some part of me wanted a family and all. And then she was just gone." He seemed to be okay with telling the story to a perfect stranger, even though Pharah had to admit that the way he just spilled out his past feelings was somewhat personal. Maybe it was just Mercy who had that influence on people or tended to choose as friend who were open books like her.

"I am sorry..." Pharah replied, not able to come up with anything more meaningful to add.

"Yeah, it was pretty tough on me. Angela was just trainin' in the military med department back then – doing some sort of practical course and assuring everyone she met that she was just there for trainin' and not going to be joinin' the ranks. I'm surprised they let her in, young as she was, and givin' us a mouthful about how much she disliked the fighting. Really pissed some people off that she would say that to the younger recruits. But she was good. She was young and *real* good. Patched people up like mad, never makin' any mistakes."

"He is exaggerating," Mercy threw in between his words. She looked guilty for past self's lack of tact back then.

"Anyway. She caught up on how down I was, took a whole evenin' to talk it over with me – how much I missed Melanie and how I couldn't even care for our dogs right because of the grief." He smiled. "And she's sneaky that one," he said, pointing at Angela. "Got me a 'dog sitter' for the time being. A nurse livin' near my place who'd come and walk them and help me get things back together after Melanie. She started off just walkin' the dogs, then helped me put Melanie's things away, clean up the place, you know – stuff that needed to be done. Only, I guess, just gettin' someone to help me wasn't really Angela's intention."

They had reached the fleet of F-35s and Pharah tried her best to stay focused on Thomas' words rather than getting distracted by the awesome machines next to her as they were passing the first three of them so closely, the shadow of the wings fell upon them.

“Somehow she got it in her head that Elizabeth and I were just – you know – compatible.”

“Actually, I thought having a decent woman around would make him brush up his act and move on as he had said Melanie had wanted him to,” Mercy added with a little glint in her eye. She had known that maybe the two of them would click, but she had not been nearly as sure as Thomas made it out to be.

Thomas smiled. “Took us another 18 months after that,” he concluded. “I still miss Melanie of course, but I know she’d like it. And Lizzy... well, she’s makin’ every day of my life special. I tell you, if you find someone like that, don’t you let go.”

Pharah smiled. “I’ll keep that in mind. And I am glad that the story took such a nice turn.” She also now understood that Thomas was not one of Mercy’s patients. They truly were friends and this – well, this was an amazing favor among friends. Thomas patted the fourth machine in the line.

“And that’s my other lady,” he introduced the F-35.

“She’s beautiful...!” Pharah gasped, not daring to touch it like Thomas was. Thomas related the exact measurements of the aircraft to her, rambling down numbers and statistics and a plethora of other details. Mercy was already getting bored, her mind wandering off elsewhere, while Pharah took everything in with much enthusiasm.

Mercy used the pamphlet from the show to fan herself and took to observing the people nearby – engineers, military personnel, people driving little service cars. Lots of little groups just standing around and chatting with the pilots, just like she and Pharah were. Pharah soon moved on to extracting anecdotes from Thomas about missions and maneuvers, but he was not at liberty to discuss too much about them. However, he related what he could and Pharah seemed more than satisfied with it. They eventually got around talking about the amazing carbon-fiber helmet that had been custom-shaped to Thomas’ head.

Mercy’s legs were starting to ache and the sun was burning on her blond head. This was not for her, however, and whenever she started getting a little too bored, she took a look at Pharah – at the attention she was giving Thomas and how excitedly she was asking questions... and then at Thomas who was just as happy to have someone to tell all this nerdy stuff to... and she realized that she could bear the sun and the smell of gasoline a lot longer for the sake of the both of them.

Thomas eventually managed to retrieve the helmet from the cockpit and handed it to Pharah. She touched it gingerly, like it was made of pure gold or even porcelain, making Thomas laugh.

“I can’t believe I am holding this...!” she mumbled, marveling at the beautiful print and shocked by how little it weighed.

“You can put it on, if you want. I don’t mind. Probably will be a little big, but you should fit,” Thomas offered. Little stars seemed to sparkle in Fareeha’s dark eyes as she gingerly brushed her hair out of the way with her fingers and placed the precious helmet on her head. It was surprisingly comfortable and did not even feel all that loose on her. Thomas opened the visor and asked her about the experience and explained a few details before he helped her take it off again.

“Thank you!” Pharah breathed out as she returned the helmet. “I wouldn’t have dreamed of getting to do this!!!”

Thomas smirked. “What about takin’ a seat?” he offered, indicating at the F-35. “Can’t let you fly he or start the engine, but other than that, I don’t see why not!”

The young police woman's heart started pounding a little as she looked up to the opened cockpit. Then she looked at Mercy, the sweat on her forehead, the hand brushing through her hair and the heated red on her cheeks. Out here on the field with the asphalt below them and the cooling engines next to them, the heat was immense. Her regular trips to Egypt had de-sensitized her to such conditions. And Thomas was probably too professional or used to this to mind. Mercy, however, seemed to be struggling with the weather.

Pharah sighed regretfully. "I think we should maybe get Angela out of the sun...!"

Mercy caught her name. "Oh no – don't worry. Please." She tried not to look too much like she was suffering, but it was to no avail. She assumed that her shoes' soles would burn themselves into the asphalt any time now.

Thomas whistled at a group of younger people in military uniforms on the other side of the jet. Two of them, a man and a woman, obediently disengaged and came over. "Take the lady to the hangar and give her some water and some shade," he said, indicating to Mercy.

Mercy sent him a thankful look.

"Are you going to be okay?" Pharah wondered. She was torn between the amazing opportunity and really wanting to make sure Angela was fine.

Mercy smiled. "I am fine. Just thirsty," she assured her date and then followed the group beyond the jets to the larger building on the other end of the runway. Thomas assured Pharah that they would catch up with Mercy later and that she was in good hands.

Pharah was still worried and only allowed herself to feel appeased when Mercy turned on the way to the hangar and waved at her, then gave her a thumbs up sign. Only then did she allow Thomas to distract her with the wonderful offer to sit in a real F-35.

The hangar was much cooler and the water bottle in her hand more than needed. Mercy was glad she had not needed to spoil Pharah's fun because she was so used to her air-conditioned hospital, car and apartment.

Once she felt a little less over-heated and had spent a significant amount of time pressing the cool water bottle against her cheek, she went to the gate of the hangar and watched the two of them at Thomas' jet. She could not exactly see Pharah, but Thomas leaning into the cockpit and talking with his typical, loose gestures, seemed to be enough of an indication that she was inside of it. Mercy smiled at the thought of how excited Pharah might feel about being wedged in there. Mercy could think of a lot of things she herself would have enjoyed more than squeezing into a tight space while the sun was trying to roast her alive, but that Pharah had a different view on that was quite fine with her.

After a few more minutes, Thomas helped Fareeha out of the cockpit and the two of them came towards the hangar, chatting. The expression on Pharah's face could only be compared to a child who had just gotten everything she had ever wanted for Christmas. It was such a sweet sight; Mercy could not help smiling involuntarily.

Thomas did not make it to the hangar, however. He was stopped by a man in a suit halfway there and excused himself to Pharah to cater to whatever this person wanted from him. A look of concern crossed Pharah's face as she looked back at Mercy, but the other woman just smiled and signed that she was ok with her hands. Pharah moved on to the hangar, glad to see Mercy standing and looking far less red in the face than she had earlier.

Mercy smiled brightly at her. “Did you have fun?”

“Did I have--- goodness, Mercy!” Pharah puffed out. “That was incredible!” She stepped into the shadow, for a moment unable to adjust to the change in brightness, and landing much closer to Mercy than she had expected.

Mercy, however, did not retreat. She looked up at Pharah, smiling. “I’m glad,” she said. “I was hoping it would be a treat.”

“A ‘treat’?” Pharah chuckled. “That experience was simply unbelievable!” she exclaimed with much elation, then got caught up in Mercy’s blue eyes. “But you are the treat,” she admitted softly.

“I’m the treat?” She found that so sweet. “How so?”

“Because you are amazing,” Pharah replied. “Thomas cannot stop swooning about what a sweet and caring friend you are. How you are the kind of rare person one does not meet every day.” She brushed a hand over Mercy’s long bangs, brushing them aside. The air between them seemed to be filled with sparkling electricity. “And I agree. Not everyone gets to go out on such a fantastic date with such a great woman.”

The blush was returning to Mercy’s cheeks, but for other reasons than summer heat. They were in the middle of the hangar – people everywhere. But those were all busy with jobs to do - they were not paying much attention to the two figures standing off to the side.

Mercy’s bright blue eyes were locked on Pharah’s and they still were physically way too close for friendship. The taller Egyptian’s hand stopped, holding Mercy’s hair away from her face, her fingers gently touching a reddened cheek. Another jolt of excitement ran through her, this time way different from how she had felt getting into the F-35. “This could have been so fantastic all on its own,” she explained. “But you thought of it and organized it for me just because I mentioned my interest in flying – just once.” She leaned her forehead against Mercy’s. “That makes it so much better and so much more meaningful.”

Mercy shifted, her head turning up some, her face coming closer to Pharah’s. There could have been anything around them – the entire world for all Mercy cared - this moment was just theirs. She could feel Pharah’s breath on her skin and the sweet tension between them that precedes a wonderful, imminent moment.

Pharah closed the distance, her lips finding Mercy’s. Her free hand found the small of her back and Mercy’s, in turn, came to a rest on Pharah’s waist, lingering feather-light on the heated clothes. The young doctor’s tummy seemed to form pleasant little knots as Pharah’s lips gently played with hers, that hand on her cheek sliding to linger on her neck, supporting it from behind.

Mercy took the last step closer, allowing their bodies to touch. Encouraged by the movement, Pharah pulled the beautiful woman more into her arms. Their tongues met between their lips, trying, testing and ultimately enjoying the new sensation. The general noise level of the hangar drowned out Mercy’s pleased little sigh, but Pharah did not need it to understand that her wonderful date was approving of the day’s developments.

They gently disengaged, just enough to put their foreheads against each other and keep that moment of sweet intimacy alive for a little longer.

“That was nice...” Mercy whispered, just loud enough for Pharah to catch it above the noise.

Thomas came around the corner to the hangar, finally able to catch up with Mercy and her date,

but seeing what she was preoccupied with, he turned to a different direction instead. “Glad to be able to return some of that favor,” he smirked.

Chapter End Notes

I'll be travelling for the next four days, unfortunately. Bear with me, updates will come.

~~Here is your poll:~~

The poll has been closed with the following results

Ask her directly. 31%

Act like they are together. 2%

Wait for Mercy to make the next move. 3%

Take and hold her hand as they leave the air show. 20%

Wait a day, then send her a gift with a loving note. 7%

Ask her to come inside when Mercy drops her off at home. 38%

Thank you for 235 votes

How does this not add up to 100% AGAIN, Poll-maker?!

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

So, you want Mercy to enter Pharah's home.

By the way, if you are anxious about when the next chapter is going to come soon, checking whether the poll was closed is always a good indicator. It usually means I started writing or have such a definite plan about what I am going to write, I am already working out the details.

Also. Don't ever presume you understand what your choices will lead to. Ha. Though in this case... I admit that *I* was surprised by the way this story went. Sometimes my muses just do what they want, instead of what I have planned for them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Needless to say, the rest of the day was pretty splendid. It took the two of them a decent while to disengage from their spontaneous kiss, leaving Mercy a tad embarrassed: Once the mesmerizing moment was over she realized that they were standing in a spacious hangar with people buzzing about them, kissing away like she and Pharah were alone in the world. Pharah found Mercy's embarrassment all the more adorable for being so belated.

Thomas made it a point to suddenly be very busy, suggesting a nice dinner location to Mercy and sending the two women on their way. Pharah thanked him a million times (again) for the experience and so did Mercy, though Thomas had an inkling that Mercy did not mean the F-35 demonstration...

There was a small, pleasant moment of tension as the two of them returned to Mercy's car – both of them were caught between the wish to steal another kiss and the inability to figure out how to initiate such a thing without feeling like corny teenagers, unable to keep their hands off each other. Truly, Pharah's earlier, passionate moment had broken an invisible wall – now both of them were looking at the rubble of that barrier, a little hesitant about stepping right over it.

The moment flew away when Mercy started the engine and took them to their dinner place, the chance for another kiss lost for the time being. Pharah could not help but relate everything she had experienced in the F-35 and learned from Thomas to Mercy, partially because she was still all elated from the experience and partially because she did not know how to make it unmistakably clear to Mercy what an incredible, amazing, unbelievable gift this date had been so far.

Mercy smiled, her mind wandering off to get absorbed in Fareeha's antics rather than her words – the way her eyebrows rose when she talked about something big (in any literal or figurative sense), the way the finest, slightest, sweetest folds would form left and right of the corner of her lips when she smiled. At the diner Mercy was sitting with her back to the corner window, seeing more than she was listening, and the light fell into Pharah's face, finally illuminating those dark, mesmerizing eyes to a distinct, warm brown – like polished mahogany wood.

After a little while, Pharah was unintentionally repeating herself, getting caught up in the best parts of the experience. Mercy laid a gentle hand on Pharah's. "Your food is getting cold..." she said

softly, pushing the hand with the fork towards the plate with a guiding force.

Pharah stopped in mid-sentence and looked at her own, full plate, then at Mercy's - which was already half empty.

"I'm... talking too much," she realized dryly. "I... I never talk this much."

Mercy stole a small piece of potato from Pharah's plate, ate it and started snickering. "I don't mind. But it *did* get cold."

Pharah looked at her plate, frowning guiltily, but another part of her was feeling something else... warmth? Happiness? Something sweeter. The fact that Mercy had just picked that potato off her plate without asking... that was very girlfriend-like, wasn't it? It at least meant that something in Mercy's head had switched.

Mercy suggested they could ask the waitress to heat it back up, but Pharah declined and finally concentrated on eating what she had left. It turned out that the parts of her food that had been snuggled together at the center of the plate were still warm enough to enjoy.

After a few silent bites, she sent a guilty look at Mercy. "Tell me something about *you*?" she suggested, sounding more like she was asking.

Mercy grinned. She put her cutlery down and folded her hands. "Like what?"

Pharah thought about this while swallowing her latest bite. "Your family? Are they still in Switzerland?" She fed herself with a half-warm piece of potato, eyes on Mercy with curious interest.

Mercy's gaze dropped to her plate for a small second, then her lids opened up again, the look on her face conveying some form unfitting emotion for the question. Sorrowful? Apologetic? Mercy was aware that Pharah couldn't know what she had just walked into, so instead of dwelling on healed wounds, she felt pity for the unintentionally awkward move.

"I told you my house is so big because I have no family. I did not just mean children of my own."

Pharah swallowed again, staring at Mercy. "I'm... I'm so sorry. I did not know...!"

"I know you didn't," Mercy assured her, trying to convey that she was not insulted in the least. "It's been a long time, please don't worry about it."

Pharah hesitated, her fork resting in mid-air. "How long...?"

That question always followed the beginning of this topic. Mercy was used to it, unfortunately. Sometime 20 years ago, it had stopped stabbing her in the heart. So she just rested her face calmly and replied. "I was five." She could see the gears in Fareeha's head turning. "Let's not talk about it," she asked. "I will tell you something else instead."

Pharah conveyed her silent agreement by picking up some meat with her fork.

"Everyone has people that influence them, right? I had a professor in med school. He was known for having developed five different procedures that today save tons of lives. He was greatly admired. The first lesson we had with him, he walked in and put a slide up on the beamer. It was a CV of a man in his thirties with bad grades, meaningless, short-lived jobs in the medical industry, a badly graded medical degree wedged somewhere in between." She took a sip from her water and dried her hands on the napkin, making a thoughtful pause. "Then he made a side by side comparison with another man, also in his thirties, with pristine grades and a superb career."

Pharah ate, but her eyes were on Mercy, listening intently.

“He asked the class which of the men in these CVs had become a leader in their field by the age of 50 - with a high-paying job inside a university hospital, teaching students.” She paused for effect. “The votes were split. Most people agreed that he *wanted* them to say that the model CV was the one that lead to a successful future, but not for what reason. Was it to teach us that the graded don't matter... or that they *do*? ”

Pharah nodded. “I assume one of these CVs was his own?” she asked.

Mercy nodded. “Yes. But he would not tell us which one. The truth was, both of these men had made stunning careers in the end, inventing, teaching and leading. And he said that it was irrelevant who of these people he was – and that should be irrelevant to us. He said it is experience that matters, however you get it. Whether it is by having great teachers and soaking up what they can give to you, or by falling flat on your nose a million times and using that to learn from it. He said that it was passion that mattered – but that there were many ways to live and to profit from passion.”

“And that left an impact with you?” Pharah guessed.

Mercy nodded. “It made me stronger, in a way, I think. Because in this profession – in any profession, I would guess – there are setbacks. And I understood not to see them as failures so much, but as experiences. As one way to get better and learn. So... I guess what I am saying is that the people that you allow to influence you... they can be parents, or strangers or caretakers,” she closed the circle. “They can be there throughout a lifetime... or for an impactful, fleeting moment.”

Pharah quietly put her cutlery aside. She had a strong feeling that Mercy had entertained and worked out these thoughts often and was giving something away of her - something truly personal. “And was it a fleeting moment?”

Mercy shook her head, smiling. “It is a long and lasting frienedship. He retired four years ago, but he calls me almost every week... and in a way, he is still my mentor.”

The touch to Pharah’s heart – carried in Mercy’s expression – was a gentle and sweet one. She felt happy for Mercy that – if belatedly – she had found some sort of family, whether she was aware of it. Yet, a part of Fareeha felt that it was time to carry the conversation to a lighter cloud. “So, since you are all close with him now - which CV was his in the end?”

Mercy smirked. “To this day, I have not found out. He deleted all his online records that might have tipped off his students, and he refused to put anything before his 35th birthday onto the university webpage. Countless students have tried, but they could never find any reliable records. All the things they *could* find – the date when he got is medical degree and from what university – those were things woven into *both* CVs.”

The investigator in Pharah sprang to life. “Even if there are no records, there *must* be people – former school mates, professors, family, *neighbors* – who know!”

“Apparently the students only ever found very loyal ones who refused to talk. And among those who did talk some supported one story and some the other. Apparently some of the professor’s friends were absolutely willing to confirm the wrong story, just to keep the confusion alive. Asking around proved to be as inconclusive as looking for records.”

Pharah doubted that it was impossible to find out. It all depended on who would have a reason or a willingness to lie for the professor and which of the two stories these particular people told. Such

things *could* be found out by analyzing relationships and backstories. However, she chose not to tell Mercy that - it was obvious that she enjoyed the mystery. Instead, she focused on her. “And did *you* ever ask him? I mean, you have a good relationship, right?”

Mercy snickered. “I ask him every year on his birthday and every year he tells me to go to hell.”

The evening continued – with a few light cocktails at a bar and more stories. Pharah first was hesitant to talk about *her* family, feeling unfairly blessed, but it turned out that Mercy was very interested in Fareeha’s parents and how they had influenced her life. There were also plenty of other things to share – about likes and dislikes, anecdotes and ideas. It finally seemed like they were – beyond the surface – starting to explore and venture further into each other’s characters and lives. There, they found many things much to each other’s liking and some surprising and interesting. Beyond the context, there were more things to spark those little flames of happiness... the way Mercy chose her words, the way Pharah played with the straw in her drink, little gestures, looks and also some of the small things that only came out when a little alcohol was involved.

As the evening moved on, Mercy kept casually rubbing her nose. Pharah inquired, curious about this new gesture that had turned up out of nowhere. She was not getting a cold, was she?

“I... this happens when I am tired. Gets worse with alcohol,” Mercy apologized. “My nose just keeps *itching*.” She giggled.

“I thought that only happens to toddlers...” Pharah could barely hide how lovable she found that detail.

“Well... I have a problem...” Mercy sighed.

“Huh?” Pharah sipped from her drink, the cool, sweet, tongue-biting liquid feeling fresh and enticing in her mouth.

“I... might have... had one cocktail too many. And I am sitting here with a police woman.” Her eyes shifted, over to the general direction where she had parked her car.

“You will *not* drive,” Pharah clarified, true to her profession. She was not quite sure what to make of this – would Mercy have really driven home otherwise? That was not good. Couldn’t such a thing impact her license as a surgeon? Like some pilots who could lose theirs, if they were caught driving drunk...? It made her queasy to think that if Mercy normally was the kind of person that would still drive under these circumstances, she might as well have first met her by stopping her for a DUI offense...!

Mercy leaned over to her handbag and fished out her Audi keys. She handed them over to Pharah. “Here, confiscate them. I’m a good citizen,” she assured her. She did barely sound drunk, though. It was the number of cocktails that had sealed the deal, rationally putting her over any acceptable limit, not her demeanor.

Pharah took them, still looking a tad skeptical about the whole exchange. She realized the idea bothered her that Mercy could be that kind of irresponsible person. A surgeon, no less.

The blond woman got up, swaying her beautiful body over to stand behind Pharah where she slipped her arms around her and kissed her on the cheek. “You are looking so shocked,” she said softly.

“I’m just worried. I’ve gone through a lot of training about how people drive when they have had too much. And what it causes...” She had. Not to mention the statistics and the accidents she had

to deal with herself in her profession. She gently tugged on Mercy's arm and pulled her over, making her lean down next to her, face at the height of Pharah's. "Promise me you won't ever drive after you had a drink." She was serious.

Mercy suddenly looked *very* sober, all joking and sweetness drained from her face. "I wouldn't drive drunk, if someone held a gun to my head," she said in a voice so uncharacteristic dry for her, Pharah's blood threatened to freeze in her veins. What was this?

"I'm sorry," Fareeha replied reflexively, "I forgot you deal with the results of car crashes yourself." She probably had seen worse than Pharah had in any police video.

Mercy stood up straight, but she slammed a hand on the table, a little harder than she had meant to. There was new flame in her eyes. "Fifteen years!" she said, suddenly full of fire, a furious flicker in her cool eyes. "Fifteen years for taking my parents and my life!!" She would not have said it with less cocktails and less alcohol. The alcohol may not have wormed its way into her tongue enough to slur her speech, but it sure had loosened the leash on her emotions.

Pharah gently grabbed the hand that was still on the table and got off her chair. She was shocked - and sorry.

"It's *your* people who should have worked harder," Mercy frowned, the anger still burning.

Pharah pulled her close. "I know. I know... I'm sorry." The truth was, it had not been her colleagues failing this woman. It had been the lawyers and judges of many years ago that had failed a five-year-old girl. Or the whole system had. Whether this failure was only real in Mercy's eyes, or a flaw truly worthy of debate did not matter. What mattered was that Angela was still hurting. She might have gotten over her parents' death as she had said, but maybe not over the lenient sentence. She wrapped her arms around her and kissed her cheek, the music of the bar bouncing relentlessly around them, so unfitting to the situation.

"I'm sorry, Mercy," she repeated. She already knew that she would look it up, see whether maybe this case had been in her jurisdiction years ago and was still on record. She did want to know what had happened, but she sure did not want to bring it up with Mercy and ask her. Maybe there was an explanation for that sentence that could help her.

Mercy was clinging to her, catching herself, telling herself she was being juvenile and silly and should not let the cocktails do to her as they did. She took a deep breath, kicking herself internally for the thoughtless outburst, reminding herself who she was. "I am sorry... that was not the right place...!"

"It's okay," Fareeha replied easily. "Let's get out of here, hm?"

Mercy realized she had ruined the evening. "We don't have to, really!" She disengaged, standing up as straight as she could – realizing half a second later that that did not really help - it was too late to save the evening. "I ruined a perfectly good day," she mumbled regretfully.

Pharah smiled, giving her a gentle peck on the lips. "You did not ruin anything." She grabbed Mercy's bag off the floor and took her hand, lifted it to give it a sweet kiss. "You got something off your chest. That's just fine with me." She had wanted to tell her something else – tell her that taking each other's worries was part of a relationship. But in the half-official state they were in, she could not find the right words.

It did help Mercy, though, making her smile a little. When they reached the counter, she had puzzled herself back together enough to insist on paying. After all, Saturday was not over yet and this was still *her* date invitation. For the same reason, she insisted that Pharah would be taken

home first by the taxi.

Pharah allowed it, but she did not like it – she felt protective of Mercy. Be it because she was part of the police force and it came to her naturally – or because it was night and Mercy was a beautiful blond woman who probably did not know how to defend herself – with or without a scalpel.

She slipped a half-possessive arm around Mercy inside of the taxi, feeling the distinct shape of Mercy's car keys in her pocket against her leg. If she failed at giving them back, Mercy would not be able to get her car the next day.

The blond woman leaned against her, mumbling something about how she had once tried to memorize the constellations and the most important stars, but how it was something that she could never remember for more than a week – the big dipper and Regulus excepted. Pharah replied that she had once been to a survival camp where they were supposed to navigate using stars, but the entire week had been rainy and cloudy.

“Tell me more...” Mercy mumbled, snuggling up.

Pharah tried to come with something, but they were almost at her place. Mercy had her eyes closed – she was drifting off. When the taxi stopped, Pharah was hesitant. Angela lived at least 25 minutes away from Pharah's place and she was already half asleep. After a moment, she paid for the taxi and Mercy did not even realize it. It was just as well, though - Saturday was technically over. Pharah got out and went to the other door, gently tugging on the sleepy surgeon.

“Come on. I can't leave you here.”

She was not there enough to protest until after the taxi was gone, though the cool wind woke her up step by step. She found her orientation and her thoughts. “You shouldn't have – I can get home.”

Pharah pulled her past the fence and up the driveway to the side. Her place was a section in a small row of a simple one-story houses built wall-to-garage, but the sidewalk was cracked and the gates were creaking. She did not want them to stand out here for too long – Mercy was fodder for wolf whistles and cat calls and who knew what else. She did take a moment to turn to her, though, speaking with soft kindness: “Do you really want to? All the way across the city – and miles away from where you put your car?”

Mercy looked at her little handbag – it was all she had on herself, except the clothes she was wearing.

“I'll find you a shirt to sleep in and an unused toothbrush, I promise,” Pharah commented on the look. She turned the key in the lock and let Mercy inside, not leaving her much of a choice.

The place was small and tidy with very little in terms of trinkets and decorations. Mercy was surprised when the tiny corridor where they had slipped out of their shoes lead to a spacious living room with a large sofa and a fluffy carpet. She stopped for a moment, not hiding how surprised she was.

“It was the only house in the area where the kitchen and the living room were not separated,” Pharah explained. “Making it wider. I like wide spaces.”

Indeed, when Mercy turned she saw a neat, granite-colored kitchen along one of the walls – tiny, but fully equipped. There, the carpet was replaced by tiles. Mercy realized this arrangement would have been a catastrophe in her own home – her kitchen was rarely ever truly tidy. It would have driven her nuts to see the mess from the sofa every day. However... Pharah's kitchen looked as

good as new, as if she had expected company and cleaned it meticulously for the sake of it.

“It’s neat...!” Mercy acknowledged, shuffling to the sofa and taking a seat among several large pillows. The cushions were the color of dark coffee, the pillows like latte macchiato – light brown and white. She did not feel so tired anymore – rather the opposite. The short nap had unintentionally served as a power nap, catapulting her into a bright wakefulness, minutes past midnight.

“Tea?” Pharah asked, rummaging around in the kitchen area.

“Okay... sure,” Mercy smiled, pulling her legs up and cuddling a particularly large cream-colored pillow. She looked over – at Pharah’s frame against the brighter kitchen light. She tried to feel what this was - this extended moment they were in. It felt warm and cozy - strangely at home in this place she had never seen before. Pharah reached at a top shelf for some cups and Mercy liked the smooth movement, the artful stretch of her arm, like someone had painted Pharah in motion.

Even when the water was boiling and Pharah turned to face her, it seemed like someone had intentionally set her in frame, right in the center of that neat kitchen. It made Mercy smile and Pharah, unsure what it meant, returned it with an added tinge of confusion.

“Comfortable?” she asked.

Mercy hugged the pillow more. “Mmh... very.”

Pharah, too, was enjoying the sight. Mercy’s lower half was curled on the sofa, her upper body draped over the large pillow. She looked almost cat-like, partially stretched on the soft furniture like that. When the tea was finally ready, Fareeha sat next to her – right on the other side of the pillow -, setting the steaming mugs down on the wooden table.

She leaned an elbow on the backrest, her fingers playing with the edge of Mercy’s pillow of choice. “Still tired?”

“Just a little...” Mercy replied. Her fingers wandered, to that same edge, and started caressing Pharah’s. They both watched for a while, enjoying the sweet contact. After a little, silent moment, Pharah pulled her legs up as well, becoming almost a mirror image of Mercy.

Mercy was contemplating those fingers, darker than hers. Able to shoot a gune ... and also able to hold Mercy’s hand with purposeful softness. She had proven that ability just a little earlier when they had left the bar. Angela had registered the touch, but it sank in only now, making her wonder about the meaning. Maybe she should ask? Wasn't that the right thing to do? Yet, she loved this silent moment too much to disrupt it - the soft touch, finger to finger. Somewhere, beyond those fingers, hidden in shadow right now, were the burn marks that would forever signify the circumstances of the first time they had met. They would fade over time – and maybe so would the memories – but they would not go away completely.

When she looked up, she saw Pharah was smiling, watching *her* now, instead of their hands. Mercy smiled back. Their relationship up to this point had been such a firework of these happy expressions. She wondered when she would start getting sore from all the little smiles, chuckles, chortles, snickers and laughter.

Pharah hooked two of their fingers together, giving Mercy’s two distinct, brief tugs. No words were needed – she leaned closer and received the kiss Fareeha’s tug had promised – over the large pillow that rested between them like a low garden wall.

The tea was forgotten, the moment stolen away by sweeter things. Mercy adjusted herself,

scooting closer, the hand that now touched her shoulder feeling warm and pleasant. She enjoyed it, maybe even more than the first one. Here, in the silence of this cozy living room, the moment was truly theirs.

Pharah kept it sweet, kind, but not too innocent. Her tongue had memorized the sensation of meeting Mercy's – that little jolt of joy that had kicked her heart rate up a notch when it had happened the first time. She claimed it, but not without a gently poking for permission first. She had suspected it earlier but now she was sure that she could potentially kiss Angela for hours without getting tired of it. The more she explored, the more potential she could find in the things she had not yet tasted and felt. They did not *adjust* to each other's rhythm; they were already in it naturally, both savoring the sweet and slow motions for the time being. No need to hurry.

Chapter End Notes

Have fun voting!

~~Here is your poll!~~

This poll has been closed with the following results:

Mercy on the sofa, Pharah in the bed. 0%

Pharah on the sofa, Mercy in the bed. 15%

Both in the bed. 30%

Both on the sofa. 55%

Thank you for 97 votes. The next part has been written and will be made available on Wednesday. :)

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

I actually added the 'both sleep on the sofa' at the last second, just for giggles, thinking 'Well, who would chose that?' ... wow, was I wrong. XD

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Kissing Mercy was quite the treat. She had that ability that not many have... tease without giving it all away, but making you curious for more. The pillow started to really get in the way, however much they squished it to reach each other. Pharah wanted to touch Mercy, feel her warm body closer, feel the soft rumble in her throat resonate in her chest, accompanied by an excited heartbeat. The sensation was kept from her by that squishy barrier.

Apparently her date shared that thought because the pillow between them ended up on the floor, disrupting the all-present tidiness of the room. Without anything in the way to stop Mercy from scooting closer, Pharah leaned back, coercing her to crawl closer to her. Soon, her knees were touching Pharah's thighs on the sofa, her body upright while Pharah was still sitting back, her head tilted back to reach Mercy's sweet lips above her. The kiss turned a little more heated, a little hungrier, carried by Mercy - and the Egyptian reflected the sentiment with much approval.

Warm hands caressed Pharah's cheeks, her neck and shoulders, exploring. She could feel how Angela's upright position had revealed the finest strip of bare skin by her waist. Her shirt was just a centimeter above the low hem of her pants. There, her body felt cool from being exposed, so she warmed it with her hands, finding it soft and just the right sort of squishy.

There was a moment in which Mercy seemed to try to end the kiss, pulling back half a breath, but she returned immediately as if she couldn't keep away. A second kiss and a third, a sweet inner battle she was fighting, brain against lips - one trying to not overdo it and the other addicted to the feeling and the taste. It made Pharah's heart skip several beats - not only because she felt just the same, but because this cute little struggle made her feel so truly wanted. What better compliment could she ever get than someone unable to stop kissing her?

She shifted, unfolding her legs and pulling Mercy on top of her, wondering whether she would be willing follow this blatant invitation. After all, kissing while sitting or kneeling was a whole different story than kissing while laying on top of someone. Mercy, however, did not hesitate. She most willingly crawled over, straddling Pharah's thighs with ease, one leg wedged between Pharah's thigh and a cushion, the other on the edge of the sofa. It was heavenly... she felt heavenly - that light weight on top of her, warm and soft, felt heavenly.

Mercy's hands planted themselves left and right of Pharah's ribcage, holding her upper body aloft as they kissed. She noticed the distinct dents in the cushions beneath her body where Mercy's hands sunk into the fabric, carrying Mercy's weight - and chuckled - as if that little woman could squish her. She blatantly placed a hand between Mercy's shoulder blades and pushed her down until she followed, laying her whole body onto Pharah's. It felt very nice... and even better when Mercy's now free hand crawled into Pharah's hair, caressing her and brushing thumb over her temple.

Finally, after several more failed attempts to end the kissing, Mercy managed to disengage. She looked happy as she gazed into Pharah's dark eyes. "That was just perfect."

Pharah pecked her lips, mumbling her agreement. Mercy then laid her head down on Pharah's shoulder, her forehead resting against a warm neck which invited Fareeha's hand to shift up into Mercy's hair, playing with the ponytail. She felt good there, like a puzzle piece matched to Pharah's body with just the perfect curves.

"You know," Fareeha spoke softly. "Earlier today I thought the day could not get any better." That smile was in her voice again. "I was wrong."

Mercy tilted her head just enough to kiss her chin in a silent reply.

"So...." Pharah continued hesitantly. "Is this... official now...?"

There was a cute giggle from Mercy. Her hand felt for Pharah's, found it and pulled it over, holding it tightly against her chest, right above her heart. There was a feeling of possessiveness in that gesture, sealed with a kiss to the fingers.

"I see," Pharah smiled, feeling that rush of elation, her hand still playing with Mercy's bright hair. Now, with the formalities dismissed so easily, she found that laying like this felt even better. She held Mercy's hand in return her eyes watching the window, but not seeing anything. She was all absorbed in other sensations for the time being. She followed the curve of Mercy's spine and shapely hips with a flat hand. She could hear distant voices outside and the siren of a passing police car... after a while, the shriek of a cat followed by a few seconds of barking. She hoped it wasn't bothering Mercy too much. Her house was probably dead silent at night and filled with birdsong in the mornings.

She wondered where and how they were going to sleep. Obviously, there was no other place for them but the bed – if they were going to be together, it would have been silly otherwise, though of course it would be something new. Maybe it was good then that it was so late and they'd fall asleep quickly. They'd ease into that part of their relationship without any wandering thoughts about whether and how to cuddle or kiss, or go even further right away. She went through her wardrobe mentally. A large shirt would probably do and she might have some sweatpants, if Mercy felt more comfortable that way. She certainly had a stack of replacement toothbrushes, towels... Maybe she could get Mercy a bottle of water in case she woke up thirsty?

She entertained these contemplations still caressing Angela, feeling her breath in the movement of her chest. Then she scolded herself for letting her head wander away from this perfect moment instead of enjoying it. She realized she probably could not be in this moment completely until she had attempted to clear those questions and made sure Mercy would feel at home and wasn't missing anything.

"Do you want me to get you a shirt and a tooth brush?"

...

"Mercy?"

Her breath was going evenly, her fingers still limply threaded in between Pharah's. Seemed like she did feel right at home... Oh well, Pharah could lay here for a while and just enjoy the feeling. She did not have to wake her right away to go to bed. Surely, in this position, Mercy herself would wake eventually and then they could set up for the night. Pharah just had to make sure she would be there to show her where to find clothes and towels and whatever else she might need.

It required a few carefully executed acrobatics to hook the blanket on the other end of the sofa with her foot and pull it over to be in range of her hand. She hardly dared to breathe so as to not wake Mercy. This was not the hardest part, however. The true challenge was slowly unfolding it with her one hand, find the right orientation and then drape it over them both – so carefully that Angela would not be disturbed. She managed – either because she was being extremely careful or because her date had a really deep sleep.

And then, when everything was set to her satisfaction, she *was* fully in the moment with a sleeping angel, the fluffy, bright blanket hanging off of them. Mercy's hair smelled a little like the bar, but mostly carried her own scent, enticing and warm. Fareeha reflected upon the day and what it had turned into, a smile gracing her lips. Mercy was hers, somehow, as strange as that was. Such an unlikely couple - but it felt just too good to dwell on that. It seemed she and Mercy were just off the same wave length - enjoying time out together rather than at home, yet taking their time with the relationship. A little teasing, comfortable with each other physically, dedicated to their work, to helping... and Mercy was beautiful, sexy and uncomplicated. Pharah had not expected that such a person could even exist, and now here she was, sleeping in her arms.

For the time being, she could stay here, caress her and listen to her breathing. They both had nowhere to be in the early morning and somehow this moment of being alone – but not alone at the same time – was very nice. Pharah was all caught up in the miracle that was the beginning of this relationship... from the first moment Mercy had nervously asked her out to now, physically close and increasingly more comfortable with each other. She wanted to let her thoughts wander further, maybe to a potential future, to subtle things that could tip her off for future date or gift ideas. Yet, twenty minutes later, she was as asleep as her blond counterpart, dreaming of the days to come.

Coffee... that scent. Warm and friendly, bringing the promise of a good morning to come and a good start of the day. It was double enticing when combined with the soft clank of a carefully set down mug on a table, calling out like it was waiting.

Mercy steered under her blanket, the pillow beneath her feeling somewhat coarse, but not uncomfortable. She blinked her eyes open, greeted by a wall of fabric, almost as dark as Fareeha's eyes. She remembered it all... the cocktails, the sofa... the kissing and the few words exchanged thereafter. But then...? Her mind was blank. There was Pharah's warm body in her memories, the way she had laid down her head on her shoulder as they had talked, the hand snuggled against her chest and lips...

'I have fallen asleep on her!' she realized and that thought woke her up a little more. She pushed herself up, slightly disoriented. While she had taken a good look at Pharah's living room and instantly felt very at home in it, she didn't remember the layout too well. She took in the window, the carpet... the fact that the cream-colored pillow was no longer on the floor, but neatly placed at the other end of the sofa.

Pharah was in the kitchen. She had pulled a table out from somewhere *inside* the kitchen furniture and produced two foldable chairs – a neat and versatile arrangement for limited space. Mercy blinked against the kitchen light, trying to adjust. Her pants had shifted some, slipped a little and she could feel the fuzziness of her hair around herself. She pulled the pants up and tried to brush her hair with a flat hand without taking it out of her ponytail – to no avail.

It was then that Fareeha looked up. "Good morning."

"Uh..." Mercy elicited uncertainly. She did not know what to say. Several things came to mind and all of them made ridiculously bad conversation starters. Somewhere between contemplating

‘How did you get out from under me without me even noticing’ and ‘I don’t usually look like a stuffed scarecrow in the morning’, her most immediate desire made the decision for her: “I *really* need to pee.”

Pharah chuckled and pointed down to the small corridor. “To your left. I put out some clothes, towels and a tooth brush for you. Use whatever else you need and take your time.

Mercy did not have to be told twice. She scrambled out from under her blanket and rushed to the bathroom. Pharah watched, sensing that tinge of embarrassment in her and making a mental note to remember to tell Mercy without being invited to that there was no need for such feelings.

The shapely blonde did not emerge in the living room again for a good thirty minutes, still in her pants, but they were now combined with a slightly too large shirt and sweater, both assets of Pharah’s wardrobe. Her hair was wet, falling to her shoulders and her face fresh and bright. She slipped onto one of the foldable chairs and closed her hands around a fresh mug of mocha that Pharah pushed her way.

“Day one... and I am already wearing your clothes,” Mercy commented, breathing the sweet scent of the only half-familiar brew. She took a careful sip, finding she really liked the mild flavor.

“And you are already looking better in them than I do.” Pharah leaned over the table and pecked her lips. She had been reading articles on her cellphone but was now pushing it aside. The sweater Mercy was wearing had been a gift from a boot camp activity of Pharah’s police department and bore a small, stitched logo just above the chest. It was cozy and of a good material as it had been given to the group for outdoor activities. Pharah had been in the blue team and the color brought out Mercy’s eyes.

Mercy tugged on one of the strings that were falling from the sweater, down to her chest. “Thank you.” She really had not wanted to slip back into her own shirt, sweaty from sleep and still carrying a bit of that cocktail bar scent. “You could have woken me, though. It would have been fine.”

Pharah grinned. “Don’t worry about it. It was not my first time sleeping on that sofa – and you make a *very* nice blanket.” She reached out to touch Mercy’s face – not to brush any strands of hair away (there were none), but just to touch her. “I would have woken you, if I had not enjoyed it so much.”

Mercy still looked guilty as she hunched over a little to sip some more mocha. This sure had not been the impression she had wanted to make on a second date. Who knew whether she had drooled, groaned, snored or talked in her sleep? Who knew whether *Pharah* would have wanted to clean herself up, change into her pajamas and get to a proper bed?

“Mercy!” Pharah protested amusedly at all the embarrassment. She laid her hands on top of Mercy’s which were still around the mug as if to warm her fingers, then put their foreheads together. “And there I was going to ask you whether you could please sleep on me every night.”

That made her chuckle, the embarrassment floating away. Pharah stole a kiss and suggested: “We could go get some breakfast and then pick up your car.”

Mercy drank, contemplating the suggestion, then closed her eyes to fully enjoy the taste of the mocha. When she opened them again, she felt a little jolt of happiness. She was looking right into Pharah’s eyes. They seemed unfathomable dark again as no light was directly shining at them. “Sounds good. I’d like that,” she said softly.

The police woman was contemplating how to handle the rest of the day. She had not expected

Mercy to be around – she had not expected that they would progress this quickly. It took a moment for it to occur to her that decisions might as well be made together. So she asked: “I promised to meet up with Lúcio later... do you want me to cancel that? It wouldn’t be a problem.”

Mercy thought about this for a moment, flattered by Pharah’s willingness to drop everything for this budding relationship. The decision was just as tough for Mercy, though. In this stage of initial, elating happiness, all anyone ever wanted was to spend every waking (and apparently sleeping) hour with the person that caused this feeling. It took experience and responsibility to understand that everything good in the world is better when enjoyed in moderation.

“No... don’t. I’d love to spend every second with you today – really. But it would be irresponsible. I have things to take care of on the weekend that I should not forget.” Those pesky, annoying things like her mail, housework, some grocery shopping and some bill paying. Everything about a hundred times worse than just going out with Fareeha and ignoring the world for all that it was worth. “How about dinner, though?” she suggested.

Pharah frowned. “Actually... I’m going to be gone all afternoon and evening, if I don’t cancel with Lúcio. He’s taking part as a judge in a music competition and I promised to help him a little.”

She seemed regretful, so Mercy was quick to reply: “Oh, that is perfectly fine. Let’s go have breakfast now and once I am sure about my schedule, I’ll let you know when I’ll be home next week. Then you can just stop by whenever you feel like it and your schedule permits.”

It was a good agreement, though Pharah was a little disappointed she could not know right away when exactly she would see Mercy again. She wondered where that tinge of disappointment came from and found that a part of her had hoped for an arrangement where they would share sleep together more often. Now this sounded like they were still going to go on dates with not as many nights spent together as Pharah might have hoped. Was she trying to move too quickly? Mercy sure seemed a little more restrained in that respect after all.

“Sorry, I know you have your routine and such,” she said eventually, “I forget that I can’t barge into it like that just because I am used to building my life around shifts.” There was a chance that Mercy, alone in her home and working long hours, did in fact *not* have a distinct hole in her life that wanted to be filled by a partner. Maybe Mercy was the kind of person that had a set life, wanted someone in it, but needed to weave that person into it bit by bit to make it work out.

Mercy laid her hand onto Pharah’s which was resting on the table, the faint bump in their road not escaping her. “I’m here right now, though,” she reminded Fareeha, pulling her back into the moment. “And before we leave...” she leaned a little closer until her lips were almost touching Pharah’s cheek, sending a sweet chill down the other woman’s spine. “...I want more of those kisses.”

The woman at the front desk seemed slightly bored. Mercy supposed that was a really good thing when the location was the front desk of a police station. She walked in, feeling a little lost, even though the entrance was tiny. The transparent acrylic of the window had merely a few holes in it to allow for some unpersonal talking – and a slit at the bottom with some kind of drawer beneath it to permit the exchange of small items.

“How can I help you, ma’am?” the lady in her uniform said with professional friendliness, not letting her boredom show. Mercy could not help but notice that the uniform looked ten times more enticing on Fareeha than on this person.

“I’m looking for Lieutenant Amari.”

"I see." The lady consulted a computer, taking her time. "*Captain* Amari is on the beat right now, ma'am. Can I leave a message?"

Captain? When had that happened? "Actually... I have something for her," Mercy replied, digging into her handbag. The lady waited patiently as she pulled out the padded envelope and let it slip into the drawer to pass it over.

The woman took it into her hand and felt the contents carefully. "Ma'am, you understand we might have to open this before handing it over to Captain Amari?"

Mercy nodded. "That is fine with me."

"I will need your name and address and the reason you wish to hand this over to Captain Amari." Mercy felt a little unsure now – this was a little more formal than she had expected. If she had anticipated this procedure, she wouldn't have come – she just had believed it would be amusing to contact Fareeha this way. Not really having the courage to back out and maybe raise unnecessary suspicion about her character, she filled out the form.

"Ma'am, can you please indicate in this field what this envelope contains?"

Well, that would kind of ruin the surprise. Oh well.

Chapter End Notes

So, what's in the envelope, people?

~~Help me find out.~~

This poll has been closed with the following results:

Swiss chocolate, neatly wrapped in Mercy's schedule for the week. 23%

Keys to Mercy's house, the keychain being a picture of the two of them at the fair. 47%

A visitor tag for the hospital that grants Pharah entrance at any time. 13%

A picture of Mercy's bed with "Sleepover? ;)" written on it. 17%

Thank you for 131 votes

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Hello, luv! The cavalry is here!” Lena scanned her tag by the door and hopped to the front desk elatedly, knocking on the acrylic glass as if she had not caught all the attention in the room already.

“Hi, Lieutenant *Obnoxton*!” Monica greeted her. She liked the quirky little Brit – and since she was always so full of energy she always took over various tasks whenever she could. She was quite a help when she was inside, though lengthy and dreary tasks were better left to someone else. “Mind taking the mail around?” she asked.

‘Tracer’ nodded enthusiastically and slipped over to the little door. Monica opened for her and dropped a stack of envelopes into her arms. “Everything alright in the district?”

“Nothing! But that’s what we are here for!” Tracer replied excitedly. “There was a robbery, two shop lifters, and we busted a kid selling drugs, a car thief, oh – and a cat someone *thought* was a burglar, but it turned out to be – well – just a cat...” she prattled on, even as the door was already closing. “Oh-oh! Monica!” she continued, sticking her head in the door, even though that one was almost closing on her head.

“What?”

“Aaaaany chance I can do round with Amari next week?” Tracer gave Monica her sweetest puppy look – and received a raised eyebrow in return.

“Now why would I do that?”

Tracer fidgeted. “I think... uh... Captain Khalil would rather have someone... someone ...”

“Calmer?” Monica laughed. “I see what I can do.” She was sure Pharah would not mind Tracer’s bubbly personality and there was little more important than the teams getting along well.

“Thanks! You’re a dear, luv!” she skipped away and into the main office to greet everyone. Then she started putting the mail on the appropriate desks. There was not much. A few notifications on wage changes, a handful of follow-ups and requests. Little came by mail these days. However, there was one thick, padded envelope addressed to Fareeha Amari. It had been cut open as mail of a certain size and shape usually was at the station to check for hidden threats. Tracer felt it – felt the hard object inside. She hesitated, then dropped the envelope on Pharah’s desk just at the right angle and speed for the contents to spill out. “Ooops!” she said clearly, just so everyone could hear that she had just done something super-accidentally.

The item from the envelope that fell out was a key, shiny silver, apparently freshly made. There was a keychain attached to it – one of those little square ones just the right size for a passport-sized photo. And there actually was a photo in it. Captain Amari herself, looking a just a little too concentrated taking a selfie together with a pretty, blond woman. She had bright blue eyes and an endearing smile. Now that was interesting.

Tracer blatantly sat on the desk and contemplated the picture. There were lights in the background – maybe a ferris wheel or at least the ticket booth for something like it. She thought for a while,

remembering that Amari had brought back some fair tickets a while ago when they were switching shifts. Two tickets. Hmm... a date?

Tracer was drawn out of her contemplation when there was a distinct beep in the corridor, near where Monica sat. Thought he ajar office door she could see how Pharah was canning her ID card at the front door, returning from her rounds. Unlike Tracer, she first made her way to the lockers, shrugging out of her jacket and taking off her belt to properly put it away.

“Anything on Fawkes?” Tracer heard Monica say.

“Nope. Elusive as ever – that is... apparently he has been seen in company again. Same as before – large, overweight guy with a ponytail. You know the description.” She took the ID she had scanned earlier out of her locker and clipped it to her chest pocket. “But,” she continued. “I do have some news on McCree. I’ll write the report tonight to pass it on to Morrison.”

“McCree – again?” Monica groaned.

“Yepp. You’d think he’d learn some day...!” Pharah closed her locker and then entered the larger office, where Tracer was still sitting on her desk. The captain stopped short upon seeing her crouch there so nonchalantly, evidently confused as to why her desk was occupied – her *desk*, not the *chair*.

“Can I help you, Lieutenant Oxton?”

“Yes!” Tracer replied, grinning. “I have a question!”

“What is it?” Pharah raised an eyebrow. If anyplace, Tracer should have been sitting on one of the Lieutenants’ desks and asked her questions from there. Not that Pharah minded.

“I want to knoooo~w...” Tracer held up the key, the chain and picture dangling down. “Who the blond lady is!”

This pretty much had the effect that Tracer had hoped for. There were three other people in the office and immediately, every head popped up from behind screens and cubicle walls. Pharah didn’t miss the sudden change in the atmosphere, of course, though it took her a second to recognize the photo from the distance at which she was standing.

“Give me that!” she demanded, taking a jump closer to snatch for it – but Tracer was a step ahead of her. She flung it over her shoulder, counting on Tariq to catch it. He did – and then took a good look.

“My, my, Amari!” he commented. “That’s ...” he made a point of exaggeratedly fanning his own face. “...quite a catch.”

“Tariq! That’s mine!” Pharah rushed over, but of course Tariq and everyone else in the room had caught up on the game Tracer had initiated – the key took another flight and landed in Okoro’s hand with a ‘clank’. Pharah tried to snatch it from the air, missed it, and then hastened to Okoro’s desk. But long before she could reach it desk, she realized she was not likely going to get the key by just obviously running around to grab it.

“I can’t even get Sandra in accounting to give me a second look,” Mahmud pouted with a look at the key chain, “and meanwhile, Amari gets herself some kind of blond, blue-eyed model or something.” He took a good look at Angela in the photo. “Man, what is that woman? A gym trainer?”

“Ah, nah, not enough arm muscle. I’m guessing she is some hot secretary or bank teller!” Tariq

took a guess. “Probably one of those that secretly runs the whole company!”

“Come on, guys, give it back,” Pharah tried. Surely, Mercy hadn’t meant anything bad when dropping something off here, but that particular item really had not been a good idea. Pharah’s colleagues could be absolutely *merciless*.

“Tracer, what’s your guess?” Tariq demanded.

“I dunno... she looks smart. Maybe a consultant?”

Pharah edged along the wall. Her idea was to take a daring and way more surprising launch over the empty table that used to be her predecessor’s and throw herself right at Mahmud. If she was quick enough, he wouldn’t throw it back to Tracer in time.

“Hey, I’m a Captain!” she protested for distraction. “You are *all* out of line!” She knew it was useless.

When everyone was breaking out into laughter at her attempt to use her rank on them, she took a leap onto the desk, assuming nobody would expect her to do so, and threw herself at Mahmud. The key went flying again, right towards the door – where Khalil was just stepping through. He reflexively caught the item that was flying at him. Meanwhile, Mahmud pushed his rolling share back which caused Pharah fell prone across his lap, her hand on his wrist – but there was no key for her to snatch, anyway.

“Fareeha, you realize that kind of activity is not permitted at work?” Khalil commented on the position Pharah was in, but he could hardly hide his grin.

Mahmud held his hands up. “Not gonna get arrested for harassment – she threw herself at me and I didn’t touch her!” he mockingly defended himself. Pharah scrambled up from him, turning a shade darker at the sight of her former partner who was – of course – taking a look at the keychain.

“Hey, Khalil!” Tariq chimed in immediately. “Take a guess at her profession. We had gym trainer, model, secretary, bank teller and consultant already.”

Khalil was grinning ear-to-ear. “I’d say she is a ...” he threw a glance at Pharah, very amused, “...surgeon.”

“Mnhmrrgh...” was all Pharah could say, unable to do anything else but wait. They were of the same rank now, but Khalil had still taught her an endless lot within her career and still felt like he was her senior. She had not expected him to spill her secrets so easily, though.

“I believe her name is... Angelika...?”

“Angela,” Pharah admitted through clenched teeth, correcting him. “And she is not just a surgeon. She is running the neurosurgery department.”

“Blimey!” Tracer exclaimed, cheering. “Tell us more!”

“Damn, Amari!” Tariq cursed. “Seriously, damn! I’m doing the whole crap – compliments, sending flowers and chocolates and I can’t even get a freakin’ date. And here’s Pharah, waltzing into a hospital and picking up the head of surgery who just so happens to be a freakishly hot, blond lady.”

Pharah rolled her eyes, but now even she was grinning. “She’s not some hot blond lady – she is an awesome person. And I also did not ‘waltz’ into a hospital. First I burned my hand, and the

next time I was carried inside on a stretcher!” She held up her hand to show the scars. To her surprised, Khalil threw the keychain at her. She caught it out of reflex. She laid it into her palm and got a good look at it – the thick silver key that and the keychain with the picture Pharah had snatched of them both at the fair. What a sweet and meaningful gift. Mercy was basically inviting her over.

“Hey. Pharah,” Tracer said, nudging her elbow.

“Hm?”

“You’re grinning like a doofus.”

And everyone was watching.

Pharah could not reach Mercy by phone after her shift had ended, so she was mulling a while over whether it was wrong or right to drive over. It was evening, the envelope with the key had arrived just that day and Monica had assured her that Mercy had brought it over personally. Obviously she was meant to have it now. Pharah regretted having asked Monica about how the key had arrived in the presence of Tracer and Tariq who had immediately pestered Monica for details about the mystery woman that Pharah was dating. However, the damage was done and she had nothing else to expect from her department but relentless teasing.

She stopped her car on the street and walked up to the gate. It turned out not to be locked, so she entered. Yet, it felt weird walking onto the property – like she was checking out some drug lord’s potentially secret base, rather than arriving by invitation. Everything was so calm, except for the evening birds, and the place was yet unfamiliar.

The key felt almost hot in her hand as she walked over the light red stones that paved the drive way. The whole little slope looked good next to all the green from the plants and the slightly wild garden around them... and the red and green made the white walls and large windows of the house look especially noticeable. The place looked so fancy – lots of large glass windows, a bright white paint job, a dark wooden terrace with heavy garden furniture. Lúcio had been so right – Mercy was way, way out of her league. And yet, here she was, with a key to the whole thing, as if it was nothing.

The front door had a little window in it, but everything lay still beyond it. Maybe this was crazy. She had never been here and there had been no note like ‘come over tonight’ or so with the key. But if Mercy had brought it personally, maybe this had been important to her?

Just to make sure she was not intruding too much, Pharah pulled out her cellphone again and dialed Mercy’s number – but there was still no response. She took a deep breath and inserted the key into the lock – if it looked like she was unwelcome, she would leave. If she caused an alarm to go off... well, she knew the entire police department, at least. And a good deal of her colleagues even knew about the key. The little silver key moved easily in the lock and the door just popped open on the last turn.

Pharah took a step inside, her fingers feeling for a light switch. “Mercy...?” She did not think Mercy was anywhere in the house, but she wanted to make sure. “It’s Pharah... I wasn’t sure you wanted me to come over...” “Nothing. Pharah turned on the lights and illuminated a white corridor with a colorful little rug on the bright tiles. Wooden stairs lead upstairs to the left and there were three normal doors around her and one set of sliding doors. At that point, her police instinct kicked in, telling her that the best hiding place in the vicinity was the closet with the sliding doors under the stairs – but that the ajar door to the bathroom could also be a nice hideout. The kitchen

was one door further and she could only see part of it. Then, there was a closed door to the front – likely the living room, and she did not know what was beyond that. She realized what she was doing and scolded herself. Like Mercy would jump out from someplace and stab her! She had no reason to suspect anyone was here, actually.

She breathed, took off her boots to not carry any dirt into the house, and moved on to the kitchen. It was spacious – probably big enough to hold every single room that Pharah was renting at this time. Lots of white, again, accentuated with dark red panels and gray granite surfaces. It looked fancy enough. There were a used mug, a plate and a knife in the sink and crumbs on the rectangular cooking island in the center of the room. One of the chairs at the table by the large window was out of place. Maybe Mercy had been sitting there for breakfast or to work on the stack of mail that was piled on that table.

There was a piece of paper on the cooking island as well and Pharah approached, recognizing it as some sort of plan or calendar. She turned it around so she could read it. It was Mercy's schedule, printed in color with a handwritten note at the bottom.

'Make yourself at home. My days are little messed up this week... maybe you can figure out a time for us to meet? ~Angela.' It was adorned with one little, quickly drawn heart.

So, she had indeed been invited to enter this place unannounced. That was a relief. She checked the time and then looked at the schedule in front of her. Apparently, Mercy was doing some kind of surgery right now – no surprise there, that she was not picking up the phone. She was also doing surgery the next evening and taking a rather late shift the day after.

"Crap. Seriously?"

Pharah had taken all the early shifts that week and got off only two hours after Mercy started her shifts.

Just at that moment, her phone rang. She pulled it out and picked up, a jolt of excitement running through her at the name on the display. "Hey!"

"Hi there. Sorry... I was in the ER or I'd have picked up."

"I know- I see your schedule... uh..." Pharah replied awkwardly. "I hope – I hope that was okay. I thought maybe you'd be home and that's why- I mean, that was a very sweet surprise today when I got the key-" She felt so stupidly awkward.

There was a smile in Mercy's voice, however. "I was hoping to run into you at the station," she admitted. "I wasn't so lucky. I just – well, I wanted to let you know that the week is a bit disrupted on my side."

"I noticed..." Pharah replied, looking at the schedule. "I thought as head of surgery, you did not have late shifts..." It was part of the reason why she had requested early shifts herself. Nobody ever requested those, though she was safe getting them, rather than late shifts.

"We are having a guest from overseas here for some very complicated surgeries. We mulled a while over what time we'd both be alert and awake enough for the tasks. Evenings is basically what we ended up agreeing upon. Usually I do not work at night anymore. It's better if I am available during the core hours every day – but in this particular case." She had forgotten this was the week that he would come over, though.

Pharah released a sigh. "Understandable... all of it. Just... I only have early shifts this week," she said regretfully. "I have to get up at 4 am every day until Friday."

“Seriously?” The regret was evident in Mercy’s voice as well. “And when do you – I mean, do you get off before I start?”

“No. Not at all.” She sighed and paused for a moment. “Guess we are really unlucky.” She stared at the schedule again. “Friday night could work, if it is not too late for you. I mean, I am changing to dayshifts on Sunday.” She would be tired, though. She wouldn’t be able to stay up until late.

There was a pause. “I suppose... you can’t stay over today until I arrive...?” Mercy asked carefully.

It was sweet – Mercy really wanted to see her. Yet, she wouldn’t get off until late that day and if Pharah wanted to get any sleep... “No point, really. I did not bring any clothes or so - and if I leave for work from here tomorrow, I’ll have to get up at 3:30. Basically – I’d have to go to bed before you’re even here.” Mercy’s house was much further away from the police station than her own little place. As much as she would have loved to just stay and see at least *something* of Mercy – and if it was only her sleeping in the morning – it was irresponsible and unnecessary complicated. They’d have nothing of each other but silent longing.

Mercy made a regretful little noise. “Oh well, nothing to be done but work diligently until Friday, huh, *Captain Amari*?” That smile had returned.

Pharah chuckled. “Busting a drug lord and getting terribly injured was really helpful with getting promoted,” she admitted. “Honestly hope that next time, I can move up the ranks with a little less damage.”

“I’m sure it wasn’t just that,” Mercy replied kindly. “Anyway. Congratulations.”

“Thanks.” Pharah leaned against the counter, looking through the big window into Mercy’s garden. It was a beautiful place – spacious, but simple. The way the house was built made all the difference – the space by the window had evidently planned for a kitchen table, placed towards the east so it would catch the morning sun. Perfect.

“Well, still – make yourself right at home,” Mercy’s voice drew her out of her contemplations. “Have you looked around yet?”

Pharah chuckled. “I got as far as your kitchen – kind of thought that was all, since my entire home isn’t any bigger than that,” she joked.

“Well, let me give you a tour!” Mercy offered – and then guided Pharah through her place: From her cozy living room beyond the corridor and kitchen, to the upstairs master bedroom, the bathroom attached to it, the walk-in-closet, the office and the bedroom. Pharah expressed how impressed she was by the house – most of all the many windows that caught so much daylight, even at this late hour, and the sheer space that Mercy had all for herself. She could barely grasp that Mercy apparently just owned this whole place. It looked huge. Not because there was not much in it, but because there was so much room to spread it all out, especially if it was just the things that single person owned. Surprisingly enough, there was no pool to top it all off. Mercy said that maintaining one was just too much of a struggle so she had explicitly looked for a home without one.

Then she unfortunately had to get back to work, but made it a point to Pharah that no matter whether Mercy was home or not, she could always stay at the house. She even explained to her how to properly open the gate to drive her car inside and how to find the button for the garage. It was sweet how willing she was to share all of what she had, how hospitable she tried to be when she wasn’t even around herself.

After the phone call had ended, Pharah returned to the kitchen, contemplating the darkening sky through the breakfast window. How had Mercy ever felt comfortable in Pharah's place? It was so small, so cramped and so loud compared to this little castle. Sure, they had a very similar taste, which had helped, but while Mercy's place had the feeling of something fresh and new, Pharah's had its used corners and broken little edges everywhere.

Pharah grabbed her key and looked at the door towards the corridor. She felt terrible reluctant to just leave here – to just stop by without seeing Mercy and leave as if she had never even set foot in the place, despite all the hospitality Mercy had offered. She looked at the clock. She could still spend another two hours or so here, figure out the TV, put Mercy's dishes away, take a walk through the garden... but without Mercy, where was the point? It felt weird just getting comfortable in these completely new surroundings without her.

Could she maybe leave something behind? She had nothing on herself – not even a hairclip. Maybe she could write a letter to make Mercy smile when she came home? She mulled over this, pacing around the cooking island, tapping her fingers on her arm.

Something... something to give back. Something nice and kind to respond to Mercy's meaningful give and show her that she appreciated it. But what?

Chapter End Notes

So, how can Pharah make Mercy happy despite being unable to meet up with her?

~~You tell me!~~

This poll has been closed with the following results:

Put flowers on the table along with her schedule for the next weeks. 6%

Returns a key of her own. 26%

Leaves little sweet notes in various places for Mercy to find. 48%

Makes dinner and leaves it at Mercy's home for her to come home to. 20%

Thank you for 285 votes!

(Yeah, I am starting to think that this fic needs to be named 'Loving with Obstacles' or something, since I just like to put stones in their way.)

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the votes.

We have a handful of new readers who binge-read this thing. Welcome you all and thank you whoever might have linked to this fic.

:3

Also, this chapter was meant to be a lot longer, but I did not want to keep you out of the decision making for so long. So I cut it into two and will adjust the next part according to your vote. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Mercy got home as late as ten at night, well aware that Fareeha was somewhere across the city, asleep in her bed. The surgery had turned out so well and she got along so splendidly with her foreign colleague, it still made her feel giddy. Unfortunately, there was no one to share that with at this time. Yet, the mere thought that Pharah had been here compensated for that. She wondered whether there was any way she could see, tell, smell, or feel her former presence in her usually so lonely house.

Once she had closed the front door, she slipped out of her shoes, her feet feeling the sudden joy of freedom – and the pain of having been walked on all day. With the pain in her soles, she suddenly also reached awareness of how tired her calves and her *gluteus maximus* – her *butt* – felt. All the standing at the operating table had taken its toll on her.

She tossed the key into the bowl on the small shelf by the door and it landed with a clank – but from the corner of her eyes, something seemed at odds. She looked over – and there, in the bowl, was a ship. A white one, folded neatly from paper, with a message written on it.

‘Welcome home!’

She could not help but smile as she picked it up. It looked like Pharah had made good use of Mercy’s home office – particularly the printer paper. She turned it in her hand to see whether there was anything else written on it – and was not disappointed. There, in very small print, was another sentence written on the bow of the ship:

‘I would have made a heart, but all I remembered was a ship.’

Fareeha’s handwriting was a fine, tidy and neat print – every letter distinct and at almost exactly the same distance, wide spaces between the words. It would have Mercy taken ages to write anything as tidy as that. She took the ship to the kitchen with her, her heart feeling weirdly fuzzy. Such a cute idea. She wished she could have told Pharah as much, but she did not want to wake her with a message to her cellphone – especially not, if she was having an early shift the next day.

Instead, she followed her personal desires to the fridge to throw something simple together – like

bread with cheese – and maybe munch on a carrot or cut herself some tomato wedges. But she was in for another surprise because the fridge made an attempt to greet her – or was that the cheese, against which the small rectangular paper was propped up, wishing her ‘*Have a good meal*’ in tidy print?

She could not help but smile and now, for the first time, began to wonder, how many of these messages might actually be inside of the house. She contemplated the paper on her cheese. It had likely had been cut from of a normal printer sheet. She estimated that its size was about a sixth of the whole paper. So... potentially, there were five more messages?

‘Well, I am looking forward to those!’ she decided and began humming ever so faintly as she got herself the cheese, some butter and a carrot - and pulled a slice of bread from the bag.

The next message appeared under the knives in the drawer with a simple ‘*Wish I could be here.*’

‘Well, I wish that, too, though I am not sure how you would fit into the cutlery drawer.’ Mercy grinned and continued buttering her bread, peeling her carrot and cutting it to sweet little pieces. As she was sitting at the table, decisively *not* looking at her mail, but leafing through a magazine, she considered whether or not she should go on a treasure hunt for all of Pharah’s notes.

Eventually, she decided that the messages were all the more sweet, if they fell into her hands at the appropriate time – she’d have fun for much longer, if, perchance, she should find one under the remote the next time she had a moment to even use her TV.

Evidently, for some of the notes, the appropriate time was that particular night, however. She found more in the bathroom (reminding her to brush her teeth for at least three minutes) and in the shower, though that one was just a blushing, happy smiley. Another one was slipped under her blanket, wishing her a nice night and wonderful dreams, and a last one had magically replaced her bookmark on the novel she was reading before sleep, suggesting she should tell Pharah about the book some time.

Mercy saved all the notes, piling them on the bedside table – except for the one that still needed to bookmark her page. She made a mental note to ask Pharah where she had put the *actual* bookmark. That one had not been particularly special, but she found it curious that it wasn’t anywhere near the bedside table.

She read a few pages, as she always did. After she had put the book away, she turned her pillow (which she also always did) to sleep on the cooler side, only to find another note right under it.

‘*You didn’t expect to find me here, did you?*’

She chuckled, added the note to the pile and closed her eyes, thinking about her half-distant girlfriend who had yet managed to be magically close by accompanying her throughout the evening. What a cute little idea. Every single note had made Mercy smile and returned that fuzzy, elated feeling to her. Every note had reminded her that she was going out with someone very special, helped her picture the woman that managed to make her nervous just by existing.

Mercy would not have asked Pharah out, if the woman had not captured her attention and intrigued her so quickly. Now, after a few kisses, a handful of sweet moments together, that initial fascination – the sense that this could really become something – was turning into something way more intense and overwhelming. It was a good feeling that made her feel so much more powerful. Today, everything had gone so smoothly and she had felt so full of energy and ready to tackle absolutely anything thrown her way. She attributed part of this to her happiness because of Fareeha. It had helped with work, it had helped with the tiredness and made everything seem so much more easy.

Maybe it was silly or at least juvenile to feel so elated by a budding relationship. But all she had to think of was Pharah's smile, her elation at seeing the F-35 up close, the way she had let Mercy sleep on her... and then, she decided, whatever ridicule she could potentially get for acting like a teenager – it was utterly worth it.

Dammit. Why did it have to take so long for her to see Pharah again? How unlucky could she be in her incredible fortune of having found her in the first place? She pondered what she could tweak to give their luck a little shove and enable her to see Pharah sooner than Friday, but she came up empty. All she could hope was that Fareeha would stop by during her break as she had done before...

...in her uniform. Looking... breathtakingly stunning.

Mercy fell asleep, her body tingling with desires, but her mind too sleepy to follow up on them.

The morning had held more notes for Mercy. Her favorite had been on the long mirror in the bedroom – the one she had somehow missed when she had gone to sleep.

'Hey, you are looking really good in that.'

At least, considering it was nearly noon, Pharah was bound to be awake at that time, even if she might be on duty and unable to get to her phone. Mercy could finally text her without risking that she would wake her.

'Thank you for all the little notes. They made my night and my morning.'

Mercy only saw the reply when she had arrived at the hospital.

'Glad you enjoyed them. Did you find all?'

'I don't know. Don't think so. Wasn't searching... I want them to surprise me again. :).'

'I see. Gotta run. Exciting stuff happening! Have a great day!'

Mercy's hand hovered over the buttons. She wanted to tell Pharah to call her later that day... maybe when she got off her shift in just a little. Surely, Mercy would find time for a short chat and hearing her voice was better than anything written, though not as good as seeing her in person. She mulled a while over whether to text Pharah to call her and hope she would see it in time – or whether to wait a little and call her herself.

'Why am I so nervous about this?' she wondered. But she knew the answer. She did not want to mess this up – it was too precious and Mercy wasn't used to feeling this nervous and giddy about someone. She hadn't felt this way for years and she couldn't quite grasp that this was happening and why this felt as good as it did. A skeptical weariness sat under her skin – like it was too good to be true.

When her foreign colleague arrived and they concentrated on the next, complicated and strenuous surgery, she tried to stay away from these thoughts. She knew her mind had to be in the operating room – as lovely as it was to get distracted by the thought of Pharah and what they were starting to have. She was assisting a world class surgeon in something spectacular and could only benefit from what she would learn.

Little did she know that the world class surgeon pretty much thought the same about her. But in the end, given both their mindsets, it was not surprising that things went extremely well. Whether

that was due to Mercy's professional skill, that streak of luck and happiness in her life lately, or the positive spirits instilled in her by her feelings, was anyone's guess (even Mercy's). The outcome was the one thing that mattered – and it was great.

Mercy and her foreign colleague fell into each other's arms, forming a new bond over the ocean that would soon be between them. When he departed to catch his flight, Mercy felt like she had just become twice the surgeon she used to be. The aftercare for the patient whose body they had restored almost perfectly would lift her spirits further.

The evening was a long one – for both Pharah and Mercy. Both were too caught up in work to do much but phone every now and then. It felt good to hear Mercy's voice, but it wasn't the same as seeing her. Mercy, in return, found a new emptiness in her home that had not been there before. It was odd since she had never seen Pharah in it. She stumbled over a few more notes – under a sofa cushion and on her computer (*'Don't work too hard. Take time to relax.'*), but Pharah had not come back in her absence.

When she finally went to sleep, she held on to the thought that she would see Pharah in a day's time and from then on, they could both be more careful with their shifts. One more day. If she slept soon, it wouldn't even feel that far away.

The next day, Mercy had barely started her last late shift, when she heard the yelling and ruckus from the waiting room. Half the emergency staff poked curious heads out of the treatment rooms. Yelling from the waiting room itself was not such a surprise in general – under the duress of *not knowing* what was happening to them or their loved ones, many people understandably lost it, demanded answers and urgent help. Fear brings out both the worst and the best in people – as did pain.

But this ruckus was different.

This was not the angry tirade of a family father who wants to know why his child is not out of surgery yet and nobody is telling him anything to calm his nerves. This was not the ruckus of a child with an injury, scared of what the amount of pain it felt might mean – or its mother crying because she could not judge the injury as well as a nurse could.

This ruckus was a fight – a brawl – the screams of someone meeting resistance and fighting either demons or treatment. These were the screams of someone either violent or mad or both. And it wasn't the only voice – there was an aggressor. Someone giving clear orders with the air of a threat dominating their tone.

Since nobody else had the guts to run out and figure this out, Mercy rushed through the winged doors, fearing one of her patients or her staff might be in serious trouble. She certainly did not want to leave the receptionist helpless until the police would arrive.

She was not ready for what she ran into – the police was already there.

There was a man on the floor – held down in a firm, professional grip – by none other than Captain Fareeha Amari.

She was in full uniform, of course, telling the man she held pinned to the floor to shut it. The entire waiting room was both intrigued and scared. The man writhing under Pharah's strong grip was looking rumples, yelling, struggling and trying everything he could to wind out of the police woman's strong grip – but to no avail.

Another woman in a near identical outfit – but with less stars on her uniform – was at the front desk, trying to dictate some sort of details to the receptionist over the screaming of the man. Every patient with children who was mobile enough to move had retreated to the seats at the back wall, far away from the struggle.

“*I said, calm down!*” Pharah’s voice was strong, clear and out of patience – but the struggle of keeping her culprit down could not be heard in it.

Mercy rushed over. “What on earth is going on, Ph-“

At that moment, Pharah looked up and talked right over Mercy. “*Sedate him, Dr. Ziegler!*”

The formal address confused her. “What?”

The man, his wild blond hair looking dirty and disheveled, wound under Pharah’s grip, trying to push himself closer to Mercy. Mercy was unaware of it, but Pharah roughly shoved him against the floor to stop the effort. Mercy had never seen her act like this – and she tried to remind herself that this was somehow a police thing and she probably did not understand it. She may not have heard the struggle in Pharah’s voice, but it sure was in her body – tense, rigid, sparkling with a little sweat here and there.

The man laughed madly. “Ahaha... I can see up her skirt!” He meant Mercy.

Pharah ignored him. “*Get something to sedate him!*” she ordered again.

“I can’t!” Mercy replied reflexively – partially because she was so disturbed by the way Pharah was talking to her. But mostly because she really was not supposed to. If she just sedated anyone who was escorted in here by police, she’d certainly violate a few codes of conduct. Without a medical indication requiring sedation, she would be abusing her power as a medic. No - she couldn’t just administer medication on a police person’s whim – she knew that much. “It’s against-“

The man began laughing in a weird, mad way. “She wants to keep the good stuff for herself, mate!”

“*SHUT IT, FAWKES!*” Pharah looked at Mercy again, impatient.

“Faree-“

“He needs to be sedated, *Dr. Ziegler.*”

She really wished she could understand what was going on here. “I can’t just sedate someone on request!” This was so conflicting. She did not want to hinder the police – least of all be in Pharah’s way – but the patient always came first. She had no idea who this man was, what he might be allergic against and why he was even here. There had been no examination and even though he was struggling and upset, no indication that his anger and struggling were a direct danger to his health. Yes, it would have made Pharah’s life easier... but if anything happened, Mercy would have to be the one standing up for it.

Pharah groaned, but she realized she was not getting anywhere. Her initial elation that of all people, Mercy would be the one storming out of the ER corridor first, had flown away. “This man jumped down a steep slope,” she said above the renewed screaming from Jamison Fawkes, her patience with the stubborn doctor on the edge of breaking. “He *seriously* hurt his leg, even though he’s too upset to feel it right now.” She took a break to gather her composure. “If you do not calm this man down and examine him, he is either going to severely hurt himself – or *me.*” She begged Mercy silently, in her mind, that she did not have to order her to get a damn syringe with

something to calm Fawkes down.

Chapter End Notes

Sedate Junkrat?

~~Take a vote~~

This poll has been closed with the following result:

Yes, he might hurt Pharah!! 59%

No, it's against the rules!! 16%

Get help from other people instead. 18%

Get another doctor to make the decision. 8%

Thank you for 116 votes in a short time!

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Monday - as promised!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Mercy hesitated for another moment, then turned and rushed back to the corridor.

“Bring me the good stuff, doc!” Jamison Fawkes yelled after her, undisturbed by the entire waiting room watching him there on the floor.

Mercy re-emerged moments later with a syringe, a spray and a cotton ball. Pharah, whose arms were starting to hurt from dragging the criminal that she had finally caught all the way in here and holding him down wished Mercy did not feel the need to bother sterilizing ‘Junkrat’s’ skin before jabbing that needle into him. She watched her struggle for a moment, finding a way to reach any bit of naked skin on the man without getting hit at the same time or sedating the wrong person – be it herself or Pharah.

Pharah eventually reached out and tore Fawkes’ sleeve clean off, exposing his shoulder. But the criminal was still struggling, filled with adrenaline from the chase and the implications of what it meant to finally be in the police’s clutches. He purposefully moved and struggled to make it impossible for a doctor who was not used to the situation to safely jab a needle into him.

“OXTON!” Pharah yelled and the other police woman came over so quickly, it was like she had warped herself there. She did not need further instructions, but pushed down on Fawkes’ shoulder so the doctor could disinfect the area and administer the sedative.

It took a few seconds to take effect, but Junkrat finally stopped struggling. “Aww... it wasn’t the good stuff...” he said with disappointed panting.

Mercy stood there, slipping the plastic cap over the used syringe she was holding and staring at the scene before her. Even though Pharah had stopped pushing, breathed a sigh of relief and was slowly pulling the man to his feet, using help from Lieutenant Oxton, Mercy couldn’t get the look out of her mind that she had received from those dark eyes. That impatience... that angry strength... She had never seen Fareeha like that.

When Jamison Fawkes was finally wedged securely between the two police women, Mercy could see the twist in his leg. Most people would pass out from the pain alone – or at least from the pain in combination with the sight of their own leg at such an unnatural angle. But the power of adrenaline could not be underestimated. It wasn’t administered to fading patients for fun, after all. Mercy figured that at this point, the man before her was unaware of the severity of his injury and probably could not even feel it. He was too caught up in a recent chase, the struggle and possibly the shock of being arrested. But Pharah had been right – he needed treatment – most likely in the form of surgery, which was a whole chapter of its own with a man in his situation.

“Room 4,” Mercy instructed, but she could not hide the shiver in her voice. She led the way while *Captain* Amari and Lieutenant Oxtan followed, the man still wedged between them. He was mumbling something about enjoying the close attention by two such stunning hot ladies – and about Mercy’s ass. All three of them ignored the comments, though Pharah was still riled up enough to be a just a smidgeon away from punching him for that last comment.

Lieutenant Oxtan turned to the waiting room just as the doors closed. “Sorry for the noise, we didn’t mean to disturb anyone!” she yelled at all the sick and injured people with such unfitting elation. “Oh, and get well everyone – sorry you’re sick!”

Pharah did not join Mercy and Tracer in the examination room – or when a significantly paler Jamison Fawkes was wheeled off for an x-ray machine. She could distinctly hear Tracer tell the man that if he messed up the x-ray picture, she would personally tie him down on the table – to which he responded weakly that he loved the idea bondage. He did not budge, though. The sedative was doing its job at least.

Mercy let Lieutenant Oxtan and a nurse take care of the x-ray, but she stopped in her tracks on the corridor, twenty steps away from Pharah, lost and unsure about how to act. That voice calling her ‘*Dr. Ziegler*’ seemed to be ringing in her ears. She turned on her heels, ready to disappear in Room 4 again and wait for Lieutenant Oxtan and the patient to come back.

Pharah waited until Junkrat was out of earshot before making her way over to that same door. “Mercy...?”

Mercy did not look up as she replied. “I do not care what you have on him. People who come here are *patients* and they get the same rights and treatment as everyone else.” She sounded defensive with an added tinge of stubbornness.

Pharah frowned being met by such a sharp edge in Mercy’s voice. She puffed out a breath, but she did not let Mercy’s upset tone keep her from entering and intruding upon the sanctity of the treatment room. “He was endangering himself-“ Pharah started, but quickly realized that it was the wrong approach.

She sat down on a chair and loosened the top button of her shirt, making herself look just that tad less fierce. She looked at Mercy who was avoiding her eyes. Instead, the doctor was leaning against the examination table with her behind, feet crossed at the ankles, arms in front of her chest, contemplating the floor between them.

Pharah watched her for a moment, then realized: “Bad cop Pharah scared you, huh?”

Mercy did not look up.

“Let me tell you what happened, okay?” She sounded all herself again – kind and gentle. Only that smile in her voice was missing this time. Her friendliness did not manage to wipe out the memory of her being violent and angry, however.

Pharah pushed her chair a little closer, using the wheels on it to silently inch in Mercy’s direction. “He’s been on the run for a while. It does not matter what he did. You were right implying that for you he is just a patient with the same right for treatment as everyone else.” She paused. “Tonight we caught him. But he wasn’t going to give up. He ran, Lieutenant Oxtan and I pursued. We had him cornered when he suddenly flung himself over a wall and down a slope. I don’t think he anticipated how steep and far it was going to be and that it led right down to the highway.”

She shifted, moving closer again. Mercy had not moved even an inch, but she was listening.

“I followed down the slope – but more carefully than he had. I was thinking that the way he was laying and his leg was twisted, he was not going to go anywhere anymore. But I was wrong – he pushed himself up and limped on, as if he could still get away.” She scooted another bit closer. “Of course I caught him, but he put up an insane struggle. All I knew was that he needed help as quickly as we could get him some. So I ordered Lieutenant Oxtan to get the car, shoved him in there and we raced here. – I was so sure that by the time we would get here, he would be in so much pain, he’d either be passed out or seeing his own need for proper treatment.” She paused. “I was wrong again.”

Mercy shifted her weight from one leg to the other.

“He walked in here alright – sweet as a lamb. And then suddenly tried to run for it again. He tried to kick Oxtan and when that did not work – for obvious reasons - he shoved her aside with both hands to clear his path to the doors.” Pharah sighed and shook her head. “His leg was giving away with every step, like a broken stick. I was worried if he put more weight on it, he’d make his bone poke right out of it.” Another scoot with the chair. Now she was close enough that if she were to reach out, she could touch Mercy’s crossed arms. “That’s when I grabbed him and threw him down and he started screaming like mad and kicking at everything around him. I tried my best to avoid his injured leg, but he did not make it easy.”

She finally lifted her arm and laid a hand on Mercy’s right wrist.

“That’s why I wanted him sedated. So he’d stop hurting himself, okay?” She paused. “I’m not going to lie. He is a dangerous, thoughtless and criminal little bastard. But he’s also an injured man who needs a good doctor...” She paused. “A good surgeon.”

Mercy shifted again, contemplating the story. It wasn’t like she did not understand it... but it had scared her. The way Pharah had *acted* had scared her. She should have guessed Fareeha could do that – it was her job... but witnessing it firsthand...? And the yelled instructions – ‘*Dr. Ziegler!*’.

Pharah seemed to have guessed her struggle: “Angela... I wasn’t going to give this man a chance to know how much you mean to me,” she explained. “I would have loved to beg you to help me sedate him, kind and with a good, friendly explanation as to why I needed you to do what I asked of you. But I did not want to tip a criminal off about what is important to the police woman who just ended his happy crime spree. And frankly... staying kind and sweet while someone is trying to kick you in the crotch is not so easy.” She leaned forward, intersecting Mercy’s gaze and looking up at her with those warm, dark eyes. “Do you understand, ya amar?”

That unfamiliar nickname pulled Mercy out of her defensiveness. She was still frowning, but that initial coldness had vanished. Maybe she really did not understand police work... maybe she had never even wanted to imagine what dangers Pharah was expected to put herself in and what kind of harsh person she could be when the situation demanded it. That other Pharah, bent over Jamison Fawkes and telling him to shut it – how could it be the same one that had spread those loving messages around her house?

Pharah slowly stood up, her hand still on Mercy’s wrist. It crawled to her elbow and up to her shoulder. Eventually, straightened up to full height, Pharah wrapped her other arm around Mercy and pulled her close. Mercy did not retaliate, nor did she uncross her arms. She leaned her cheek against the rough, thick fabric of Pharah’s uniform shirt and could feel the thick vest beneath it, meant to protect the young woman, even though it once had failed – as the scar below the shield still attested to it. Gentle lips kissed Mercy’s hair while a soft hand caressed her back.

“I’m not sure what to say,” Pharah admitted. “The way I acted upset you and all I can say is that it

was necessary. But that wasn't *me*, okay?" she clarified. "I don't enjoy doing that, but sometimes the safety of everyone around me – including you, my partner, your staff and your patients – is more important." She kept caressing the slightly smaller woman over the fabric of that lab coat that was not even so different from the shirt she was wearing. "Are we okay, Mercy?" There was pause. "Are we okay?"

Mercy nodded. In the end, they still had the same goals: Keep everyone safe and healthy, including criminals and other unpleasant folk. Their ways of going about it were different, but ultimately, there was nothing truly sinister about either of their callings. She couldn't hold Pharah accountable for doing what she felt was right in a truly nerve-wrecking situation that she had not been entirely prepared for. She uncrossed her arms and slipped them around Pharah's waist instead.

Pharah felt a breath of relief, though she was still too worried to give it open room. So she just held on to Mercy and mumbled: "I've missed you."

"I've missed you, too."

It turned out that Jamison Fawkes' leg was broken clean through with significant tissue damage around the bone thanks to the way it had been treated during the chase and struggle. This time, when he came back, he had started to look truly sick. The heightened alertness from the chase had completely worn off and put him into a much better awareness of his own medical situation. Luckily, the sedative also kept him from freaking out about it.

Mercy had to chase Pharah out of the room when she explained to Fawkes what she would have to do in order to set his leg straight and get his signed permission. Criminal or not, there was a confidentiality agreement and she saw no reason why the two police women should breach it. Lieutenant Oxtan was perfectly willing to go and chat up the nurses and the doctors and any waiting, bored patients she could find, whether they liked it or not. Pharah called her base to make a preliminary report and Mercy gave every instruction she needed to in order to get the operating room ready.

Pharah had just gotten off her work phone when a distressed nurse she had seen earlier was about to brush past her, but stopped in her tracks. "Dr. Ziegler – where is she?" Evidently, the nurse had seen her with Mercy earlier and figured Pharah would know.

"Room 4, I think," Pharah offered, curious about the distress on the woman's face. The woman did not even hesitate but stormed the room that Mercy and Junkrat were in without even knocking.

"Mercy, thank goodness!" she exclaimed.

"I can't right now, I have to prepare for--"

"I'm sorry, but Mrs. Black is here with a girl...!" The nurse burst it out in a haste. Pharah figured it was the only way she thought she could immediately grab Mercy's attention – some word in there was a buzz-word that, indeed, made her look up – likely the name 'Mrs. Black'. Pharah waited and observed.

"What?" She turned around. "Why?"

"She- the girl – she is thirteen and she hurt herself. As in – deliberately, they think. Though they don't know for sure."

"Is Dr. Ricura not on duty...?" Mercy replied hastily, her mind halfway to the operating room and

the complications she would have to expect due to Fawkes' complicated fracture.

The nurse hesitated for only a split second. "The girl won't talk to anyone. They think she rammed a nail from a nearby construction site into her hand, but nobody knows the damage. They got her to bandage it up, but she won't talk to anyone – she won't let anyone examine her... I don't think Dr. Ricura could get through to her, even if she wanted to..." The ellipses at the end of that speech were well palpable and almost immediately, there was an internal struggle finding its way to Mercy's expression.

The nurse took a deep breath. "Mrs. Black thinks... you have a chance of getting through to her... find out what the damage is."

There. That magic name again – it pulled an immediate reaction to Mercy's face – as if she was bracing herself for something bigger. "Anything on the damage? Any estimation? Can she move her fingers?"

The nurse shrugged. "Nobody knows," she repeated with a sense of urgent emphasis. "They know the nail went all the way through. But whether that was between the bones and tendons, or whether the nail hit any nerves, or was rusty and dirty enough to give her blood poisoning ... nobody can get through to her enough to find out." The pleading in the nurse's voice was all too obvious.

Pharah took a step closer, behind the nurse. "Wouldn't she be in much more pain if the injury was serious and therefore willing to be treated?" She watched as someone wheeled Jamison Fawkes' past them. Lieutenant Oxton was keeping a watchful eye on everything.

"Not necessarily," Mercy replied. "What gets people to freak out is if they cannot feel or move their fingers anymore, if they care to even test it. But a lack of much pain might be ... well, it might make it easier for her to refuse having anyone take a look at it. And she might be too young to worry about having severed anything important."

Pharah snorted. "I'll hold her down for you, if I must."

Mercy winced at that – a much stronger reaction than Pharah had expected. Something was still at odds here and she realized she should not have said it. Maybe it was just too much of a reminder of what had distressed Mercy about Pharah earlier.

"Sorry," she said reflexively. "It's just – Fawkes definitely needs your help and this child – as tragic as this is – is holding up everything for a likely self-inflicted injury that may or may not be able to wait. You're the best surgeon – you know where you should put your skill, right?"

That again surprised Mercy. She had not assumed that Pharah had any feelings of attachment to the criminal she had been chasing. Maybe care of some sort could go many ways – maybe familiarity and a little compassion could also come from chasing each other around the city, or maybe even being impressed with each other's skills, despite being on opposing sides. Regardless, she could see that Pharah did not want her culprit to suffer – and for all Mercy could tell, it wasn't guilt because he had gotten hurt on their chase.

"Mrs... Amari, was it?" The nurse said. She realized that they had met before, a while ago – Mercy had been asked to sign off on Pharah's treatment...

"Yes."

"I don't think – I don't think you are quite in the loop here... No offense."

Pharah shrugged, nodding. "None taken. I am sorry for intruding." She looked back down the

corridor to where Oxton and Fawkes had disappeared. She could not hold it back, though – if Junkrat’s surgery was going to get delayed, she at least wanted to know why. “I’m sorry – but – but what exactly do I not understand?” She directed the question at Mercy.

Mercy avoided her eyes. “Later.” She turned back to the nurse. “If I take this case – the girl – who is around to do the surgery on the broken leg?”

The nurse fidgeted. After a pause she said: “Dr. Tibman is on call... he could be here in 20 minutes.”

Mercy sighed, rubbing the bridge of her nose. Ben. Ben was a good surgeon, but a very careful one. The prospect of complications that could easily be avoided by amputation was never sitting well with him. If she let Ben do the surgery, Jamison Fawkes would have a quick recovery... but no leg. If she did it herself, she would try to save the leg as long as she could, accepting the risk that she might lose, anyway. The patient would have a long road of pain and struggle ahead of himself, but he may come out with a leg worth walking on. And she refused to ask herself whether this struggle was worth it for a criminal – Jamison Fawkes was a patient, nothing else.

There were other doctors she could have told to save the leg, but they would neither have the skill for this particular case, nor were they available. And the stakes about the 12-year old girl? Maybe the hand wasn’t in any trouble at all. Maybe it could wait an hour or two to do the surgery. But there was a reason they had come to *her* – not to Dr. Ricura. There was a reason they wouldn’t call Ben in to try and get through to her...

At that moment, a tall, black-haired lady in a black skirt and blazer pushed her way past Pharah, completely undeterred by the fact that she was shoving a fully armed police woman aside.

“Angela! I am so glad you are here!” Her accent was a heavy version of Mercy’s. “I don’t know what to do. Lina has been with us for half a year and it’s gotten worse and worse!” It came bubbling out of her. “I am not sure whether the other kids are doing anything to her or whether it is just the girl herself. I want to – *we* want to help her, but I’ve tried everything and I just- I can’t understand her.”

“Susanne...!” Mercy looked both elated and pitiful seeing her. “Ich muss operieren – ich weiß nicht, ob ich Lina den Vorzug geben kann. Ich versuche gerade, einen Ersatz für mich zu finden.“

“Bitte – ich weiß du verstehst sie besser als ich. Und ich habe so Angst, dass sie sich ernsthaft verletzt haben könnte! Der ganze Verband hat sich vollgesaugt und sie lässt niemanden ran!” Her voice was pleading, begging Mercy to help her. Pharah did not need to understand the words to catch it.

“Mercy – what’s---“ she began, when it hit her. The unfamiliar language, the trusting relationship between Angela and Susanne Black.

“Susanne,” Mercy said. “Setz’ dich bitte wieder ins Wartezimmer. Lina ist in den besten Händen, das verspreche ich dir.“

Upon these instructions, the older lady nodded, turned and obediently left the corridor. Mercy rubbed a hand over her face.

“I’ll call Dr. Tibman,” the nurse said. “Just in case.”

Mercy let her leave and then took three steps around the room, thinking. There was Jamison Fawkes, *definitely* in need of urgent help. There was the girl, *possibly* needing help and having a struggle that Mercy was all too familiar with. Her heart went out to the girl, her mind went out to

the operating room.

Pharah contemplated her, thinking. “That woman... she is from *your* orphanage, right?”

Mercy turned around, like she had forgotten Pharah was even there. “Not quite. Not anymore... but- yes, close enough.” It was not what distressed her so, but she did not have the mind to relate any more to Pharah than what she felt she needed to. “Susanne used to run the orphanage in Switzerland. It’s coincidence that we are both here now, but she is still in the same ... profession.”

She was probably the closest thing to a mother that Mercy had, Pharah thought.

“And the girl... do you know her?”

Mercy shook her head. “She must be new. She must just have lost her parents.” She ran a hand through her hair. “I know what this sounds like – but this isn’t a movie. I’m not a therapist or a psychologist, I am a surgeon. I *know* your culprit needs my professional skill, but it’s not that simple.” Suddenly, her worries and contemplations were bubbling out of her, like she could not hold them back anymore – not in front of the person who she felt so connected to. “*I* am a human being. I might stand at the operating table and *not be there* because I know this girl is hiding in some corner of an examination room and suffering. And – I – I feel for her. I can’t tell you how much I feel for her. I- I understand why she- what she did... I- but I cannot let that get in my way, right? Other people will be here to observe her, to try her best – who says I am the only one who could make her—who could-“ She dropped her hands, every inch of her body conveying her inner turmoil and frustration.

She turned to Fareeha and looked at her, lost. “I don’t know what to do.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, do you know?

~~Vote here, you poor souls.~~

This poll has been closed with the following results:

Lose a leg (Go to the girl.) 91%

Lose a hand (Treat Junkrat.) 9%

It appears I did not put up quite the moral dilemma I hoped I would. Oh well - who cares if Junkrat has a mechanical leg in this story, too - he has that in the game anyway, am I right?

At least 27% of you complained that I only gave these two options. :D

Thank you for 169 votes. Sorry for the delay with the updates, the week was a little crazy and I am moving in a week and need to pack. :(I'd rather be writing.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Dear readers, I am SO sorry this took so long!

I was moving while not getting much time off work – you can imagine how well that went! So, really all I did was either work, shop for essentials or move. I got up at 6 am and usually fell into bed, dead tired, by midnight. My apartment is now finally set up, but I am still working 13-14 hours a day.

All I can think about is how much I want my girlfriend and how much I want to write – even though I now live in a most beautiful countryside apartment with an awesome landlady and great neighbors and I am greatly enjoying my job.

Now onward to what you have been waiting for.

I apologize that it is short... but I do want your decision. Also, the characters developed a life of their own and did things I did not intend for them to do. Now here we are.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Angela...!” Pharah put a soft hand on the doctor’s shoulder. It was true that she felt a tad responsible for Jamison Fawkes’ injury and really wanted it to be set right. She knew Mercy could do it and she had well understood that Mercy was the only one who would do everything to save Junkrat’s leg – so there was a part inside of her that wanted to push Mercy to go to the ER and treat that crazy delinquent. But another, very important part could very well see the distress her girlfriend was in. And if she dug truly, deeply inside of herself, Fareeha could not deny that she actually knew what the only right decision would be for Mercy.

She took a little, decisive breath. “I think you’ve already made your decision. Your heart is with the girl – it’s your head that wants to go to the ER because it’s the most rational decision. And maybe, while you want to overrule your feelings to do the rationally right thing, you can only do your best work if your heart is in it, too.” She glanced in the general direction of the ER. “He’s an adult man. He jumped and took the risk. Your orphan girl is not that old and not that able to foresee the consequences of her decisions. She might not even be at fault and a permanent injury could be a lot harder for her to deal with. Jamison Fawkes will end up dealing with a lost leg – he isn’t the only one missing a limb in his ... ‘profession’.”

The guilt was still plain on Mercy’s face, despite Pharah’s words. She too, glanced towards the ER. Lieutenant Oxtan was peeking through the glass window, trying to see what was happening to Jamison Fawkes. Beyond the hallway, in the waiting room, Mercy knew that Susanne was waiting as well. And it did tug on her. She knew Fareeha had read her just perfectly, but the guilt still lay heavy on her soul. Fareeha was right: If she was not going to treat Fawkes, she would make the less rational decision. She would decide to drop a case that was certain to be a serious injury for a case that just might be a heavily bleeding scratch.

She looked at her own hands – hands that could save a leg – and wouldn’t. “Let me... let me

instruct the nurse on what to tell Ben about the operation,” she said. Not like Ben needed anything else but the x-ray image – but it would calm her bad conscience, maybe make her forget that she had made the clear decision that a patient would lose a leg today because of her.

“Sure, go ahead,” Fareeha encouraged her, her dark eyes trying to smile to give Mercy the strength she needed.

It did not take long for Mercy to get this task out of the way and return to the hallway where Pharah was still waiting. She truly hoped Mercy would be alright – but already, having made a decision, seemed to have lightened her features.

The nurse from earlier passed, informing the young doctor that Dr. Tibman was on his way. She intended to leave in a hurry, but Mercy stopped her in her tracks with a soft hand on the woman’s shoulder. “You’ll need to join me,” she said clearly.

The nurse blinked at her. “What?”

“In the examination room, with the girl while I talk to her.”

“Mercy – I can’t. There is a waiting room full of patients, we have two ERs running, two police officers in the house that will need reports and you know that the regular station is overfull as well - and a lot of patients need regular tending. I mean – someone will be out here in case you need assistance with any procedures, but you’ll have to use us on demand not have us stand by.”

Mercy looked deeply into her eyes. “The guardian – Susanne – said that she was not certain whether or not the wound was self-inflicted. You know as well as I do that in case the girl admits to being a victim of a crime, we need a second person in the room.” She knew she was right. Hospital policy demanded it. There had been incidents in the past where a single doctor taken off his confidentiality agreement had not been enough to let justice win in a courtroom. Ever since, the hospital had taken pre-emptive measures to prevent this in future.

The nurse gestured at the doors at the end of the hallway. “Then get Susanne Black in here.”

Mercy shook her head. “The girl isn’t going to talk in Susanne’s presence. I know the effect she has on the orphans, as well as she may mean, she is just... it’s like putting the parents in the room with a teenager. They will invent something rather than tell the truth, you know?”

The nurse shrugged helplessly, then gestured at Fareeha. “Police makes a good witness...!”

Fareeha, whose gaze had been darting back and forth between the two women, nodded quickly, sensing her chance to help out – but Mercy was faster, cutting in before Pharah could speak.

“An *intimidating* one. No offense, Fareeha, but in your uniform, you’d make an even worse witness than Susanne. Plus... I guess you should go back to your duty and not-“

“Well, then let’s get me out of the uniform, then,” Pharah suggested, breaking Mercy’s flow. “Lieutenant Oxtan and I were supposed to be off duty minutes ago. She can go watch over Fawkes and I can help you out. Just... get me ... a labcoat or something.”

The nurse nodded, looking extremely satisfied. “There you go – problem solved. Now excuse me... lots of work to do!” And with that, she rushed on. Mercy’s distinct ‘No, wait!!!’ seemed to bounce off the nurse’s back – unacknowledged.

She turned and gave Pharah such a dubious frown, she should maybe have felt insulted.

“I am not *that* intimidating,” she protested. “Plus...– you should have a witness that can honor the

confidentiality agreement if she needs to. I will do that.”

“I can go and find another nurse who is more likely to follow my command,” Mercy said bitterly. It did not sit well with her that her own staff had refused her bidding so outrightly.

“And that will take a while, if you are successful at all,” Fareeha added. “And you already made a decision to help that girl as soon and in the best way that you can. Now don’t pull back or delay things just because your staff is busy.”

Mercy was still obviously unhappy with the suggestion. Her eyes darted over to Lieutenant Oxtan who was currently wiping the fog off the glass window to the ER – she had put it there with her breath, trying to see what was going on inside. Fareeha followed that look.

“Oh no... you do not want *her* in there, trust me. She’s great but... she kind of can’t sit still. The atmosphere would be very different with Lena in there. Plus... it doesn’t solve the problem you seem to have partnering up with a police woman.” She hoped it was that. It would be quite painful to learn that police woman in general were fine, but she, Pharah, was not.

Mercy sighed. “Okay.” She paused and then repeated with reluctant acceptance: “Okay.” Her gaze wandered over Pharah’s uniform – something she would otherwise have found very intriguing, but now found absolutely counterproductive. “I’ll... get you something to wear. We’ll tell the girl you’re a nurse and that you need the computer in that room. I’ll open a file for you and I’ll give you a pad or a clipboard or something and you’re just going to sit there and look busy while you’re listening.”

“Whoa, hold on,” Pharah interrupted. “You know I know how to interrogate someone – even children, right? If anything, maybe I should be actively helping-“

“What? Fareeha, this is *not* an interrogation! That is *exactly* why I want you to stay back. The last thing this girl needs to feel like is like she is being questioned or doubted!”

“Why would she feel doubted? What kind of view do you have of interrogations? It’s not like in the movies, you know? All I am saying is that I can help extract information – by understanding who I am talking to, feeling my way around and gaining trust. By empathizing. And what you want is information, right? That *makes* it an interrogation – but not in the way you think.”

Mercy frowned, crossing her arms. “This girl is probably traumatized... scared... depressed. I don’t want her to pull back or feel threatened.”

At that point, it was difficult for Pharah not to get irritated. The view Mercy seemed to have of her did not sit well with her. “You don’t have to tell me that, really,” she replied, trying not to snort. “I have spent hours upon hours studying traumatized people, watching those who had to deal with them and dealing with them myself. Do you really think I can only play bad cop?” She had a feeling that the way she had handled Junkrat still was not doing very good things in Mercy’s memory. But that gave her no right to put Pharah into some sort of bad cop category. The most annoying thing was that she did not quite know how to explain to her newly found girlfriend that it was actually a huge part of her job to console witnesses, accompany them through shock and grief, calm them down and then find out what they knew – while being there for them and helping them at the same time. How to tell her that consoling that girl and simultaneously finding out what happened to her was *exactly* what she was trained to do.

“Fareeha, this is *my* hospital and *my* job.” Mercy’s voice had gained just a smidgeon of volume – but it was enough to convey how irritated she was. Fareeha was feeling likewise and was very aware of that. It was clear that Mercy did not trust her – and that hurt bitterly. They had barely gotten together and somehow they were fighting already. How had they gotten here?

And yet. There were more important things at stake. Yelling at each other, however toned down, was not going to help.

Pharah took a deep breath. “Stop,” she said softly. “I don’t want to fight with you. You are stressed, I am stressed and there is a girl in need waiting for you.”

Mercy’s features softened ever so slightly and she looked up, her bright, blue eyes carefully contemplating Fareeha. She was interested – listening for what was going to come – but she was not yet ready to compromise.

Chapter End Notes

So, what is going to come, Pharah?

~~Here is your poll!~~

The poll has been closed with the following results:

Convince Mercy to let Fareeha take an active part in trying to gain the girl’s trust 55%
Stand back and let Mercy do all the talking. 45%

What a close call!

Thank you for 207 votes!

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Guys! This is the FIRST day, I am able to just sit down and write before 8pm since I got my new Job in February! I was so excited, especially since this part is so delicate and important to me. I thought it would be SO hard to write, but I've been plotting it out in my head five times over (since I couldn't write but wanted to). Now it basically wrote itself all on its own.

You have chosen that Pharah should take an *active role* in the examination room. Very well.

As an extra, fun tidbit: I never intended to ever give that choice to the readers. My choice would have been the other one. So... you basically threw all my plans over board and made me re-plot (good thing I do so many car rides). Congrats. XD

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Look, Angela... how about this,” Fareeha offered. “I’ll let you try your best, but if I find there is something I could do to help, from a viewer’s perspective, I will jump in – carefully.” She could still see the doubt in Mercy’s eyes – and she waited, hoping that with some luck and some contemplation that look would change. But it did not.

Pharah did not doubt Mercy could get the girl to agree that Mercy would treat her – all her staff seemed to think that this was her forté, so who was Pharah to doubt that? But she was not so sure about how much Mercy would invest emotionally and whether her skills would extend not only to achieve that she could treat the girl – but also get her to admit whether or not anyone else had been involved in this. Moreover, if she got this chance to show Mercy that she, in fact, wasn’t a violent, ruthless cop, but had many sides, even in her profession, maybe Mercy would finally get over that disdain about what she had witnessed Pharah do to Junkrat earlier. And given that she did not want to lose Mercy when she had just found her, that was actually very important. Pharah could not give up trying to take part in this and show that she could be supportive and an asset in this difficult situation. But maybe she had to compromise a little.

She considered her next words carefully: “What we could also do is – let me watch. You can concentrate on your words and I can concentrate on her body language and her expressions – maybe find a way to let your know what I am seeing. I’ve always been told that this is one of my best skills with people.” She refrained from calling it “interrogation skills”. She was almost certain that this would not have sat well with Mercy. “I will only talk when you ask me, or when I am absolutely certain that it could help you.”

Mercy sighed, but then nodded subtly. “Okay. It’s just getting late and we do not even know what we are facing. I guess we should get going and not debate any longer.” It was a feeble agreement from her side – but it was one. “Let me get you some scrubs.”

In a last moment of contemplation, Mercy slipped out of her lab coat and dropped it on a cart by the examination room. She gestured at the discarded garment. Pharah – who now, of all things, was in reddish-pink scrubs – and looking like the most harmless thing on the planet, raised an eyebrow at Mercy.

“I think it’s too... formal,” Mercy explained. “She might trust me more if I look more casual.”

Pharah thought about this, the look from her eyes sufficient to keep Mercy from entering the examination room yet. Then she reached for the coat and unclipped Mercy’s name tag from it. She reached out and fastened it to the doctor’s pale orange, soft sweater instead. It was a good compromise – while it was true that a lab coat could be intimidating, there were situations where it should not be forgotten that Mercy was a person of authority – but only so much. This was a nice bit of both.

Mercy nodded with satisfaction, then pushed the door open to enter first, Pharah following suit.

‘Lina’, as Susanne Black had called her, was sitting on the stretcher, which was a step away from the window. There was light on the parking lot outside. Her long, dirty blond hair was in a messy bun, her legs crossed at her ankles. She was lean and angular and very pale. She might have been fourteen or fifteen – but had retained a child-like figure at this time. Her shirt was fashionable, her jeans tight. She was pointedly staring out of the window, ignoring whoever entered. Her right hand was in a thick, messy, blood-soaked bandage with dirt on the edges.

Mercy calmly walked over and grabbed the rolling stool while Pharah sat a little in the back, turning the chair from the computer to face the scene.

“Hello Carolina,” Mercy said calmly and kindly. “I’m Dr. Angela Ziegler.” She paused for a moment, but there was no movement from the girl. “If it’s okay with you, Fareeha is going to stay here to assist in case I need some help.”

She waited, leaving a gap for the girl to fill – after all she had been asked for her opinion. ‘Lina’ just shrugged, very subtly. Neither Mercy nor Pharah missed it. Pharah thought for a moment. Because she had not turned, the girl had not seen Pharah. Because she had not said anything, the girl had not heard her. She had only heard Mercy’s talk about her, maybe heard her extra set of footsteps as they had walked in, and maybe seen a faint reflection in the window to fathom who that third person in the room was. That wasn’t good. There was no way, Carolina could form an opinion about Pharah yet, and certainly not a positive one.

She decided to immediately break her promise to Mercy. “Thanks for letting me stay,” She said before Mercy could take the conversation up again. “If I’m too much, you just let me know and I’ll leave.” She tried to make a smile evident in her voice, which came to her naturally. “Oh. And you can call me Pharah. Everyone does.”

“That’s right. We have a lot of nicknames around here,” Mercy agreed, no annoyance with Pharah’s broken promise in her voice. “In fact, they call me Mercy, rather than Dr. Ziegler.” She paused again. No reaction. “Is there anything you would rather like to be called? I know Susanne calls you ‘Lina’, but she tends to give nicknames without anyone’s consent. I remember it well.”

“Yes. We’d rather hear what you would like to be called,” Pharah agreed.

No reaction.

Pharah had not expected her to be an easy nut to crack, anyhow. Teenagers could be stubborn –

hurt ones even more so. However, the pause that followed due to the lack of reaction from Carolina was about to spread into awkwardness. Mercy seemed to consider her words, not realizing that she was maybe taking a smidgeon too long. Pharah decided they had to keep the conversational thread going and broke her promise a second time.

“What did she call *you*, Mercy?” she asked.

“Angel,” Mercy supplied the information, crinkling her nose. “I hated it. It was so stereotypical – blond hair, blue eyes, fair skin... and my hair was longer then, too.” Since Carolina was not looking, Mercy sent Pharah a satisfied little look – it had been quite a good idea to address Mercy and keep the conversation on exactly this topic. Here, through her knowledge of Susanne Black, the unwanted nicknames and the obvious conclusion that Mercy was an orphan, too, the doctor had a chance to connect with the girl. Pharah nodded in return.

Mercy wisely turned her head back to the girl before she continued. “It was bearable because Lynn was there, too... she has a bit more... empathy, I guess.” She was still pretending that she was answering Pharah’s questions.

There was a slight movement in the lean girl’s body – a twitch of her arm, right up to her shoulder. Mercy had caught it as well. She shot Pharah a quick glance and the young police woman mouthed the word ‘Lynn’ back at her. Then Pharah slowly got up, walked to the door and turned one of the light switches, praying it was the right one. To her relief, she managed to brighten the light near the examination table by a few notches. Now with the darkness outside setting in further, Carolina could see them in the reflection of the window. And, even more importantly, Pharah could see Carolina’s expression in the glass pane.

Mercy had, of course, caught on to the fact that her little patient had reacted to the other woman’s name. “Carolina, do you know Lynn, by any chance?”

Again, a small movement. And a frown. A definitive frown.

“Huh? Is it that you don’t like her? I thought everyone did...” Another pause. “Caroline?”

The frown deepened. “Lynn is retired.” Her voice was quiet and defiant. She obviously tried to sound annoyed, but there was a tint of sadness in her voice.

The first bit of ice was cracked – Carolina had talked to them. Both adult women kept their faces in check at this success moment, however, just in case Caroline could see them well enough in the window pane.

Mercy sighed. “Oh... goodness... I can hardly imagine... Susanne means so well and she makes sure everyone is fed and clean and clothed. I mean, I think she does love her children – all of them. But... well... she isn’t the most... perceptive of people,” she was speaking as if she was explaining it to Pharah. “I can hardly imagine how tough it must be sometimes with only her around – no Lynn to balance her ... crudeness.”

Carolina snorted – Pharah guessed she either meant Mercy’s use of ‘sometimes’ or the understatement in the word ‘tough’. It was clear that Carolina did not think too highly of Susanne Black. Pharah could imagine – the darkly dressed woman had, indeed, not made a very empathetic impression on Pharah. It was more like she had crawled right out of a bad story on orphanages by her looks alone, even if her obvious concern for her wounded protégé had been very evident. Pharah guessed that life had made her a little bitter over time. She probably had a lot on her plate. Running an orphanage was likely a matter of careful calculations, of rationing every available funding, and, consequently lots of sorrow. Not to mention that the fates of orphans were rarely pleasant stories. Who could blame anyone who tried to detach herself from the dark well of

adversity by becoming a little less affected by it?

“Maybe a new person will come in?” Pharah suggested. “To replace Lynn.”

“Yeah right,” the teenager threw in sarcastically, prompting Pharah to continue – the fact that Caroline was so annoyed by her right now would be a perfect base to extract some information. “What makes you so sure? Someone has to take up the work load, right?” Pharah mused loudly. “Or have your numbers dwindled so much in recent years that it isn’t necessary?”

At this point, Caroline’s head turned. Not to face them, but to look at her bandaged hand, resting on her lap. Her voice was still defiant when she spoke: “I wouldn’t know. I haven’t *been* there.” It was meant to sound like an accusation or a mockery of the assumptions Pharah was making about her, but beyond the sulky tone, there was pain.

Mercy, too, understood by this statement that Carolina was a recent addition to Susanne’s house. That meant that she must have had the dreadful experience of knowing her parents for many years, very consciously, before losing them. Or at least one of them. The pain was fresh, the scars in her soul and heart not yet formed... and Mercy was filled with instant pity – empathy for the pain that the child was suffering beyond the obvious injury on her hand.

Pharah watched her girlfriend turn her head for a moment, pressing her lips together, swallowing something from deep within that wanted to surface. She did not – could not know – how much this was affecting Angela... And for the first time Pharah realized that maybe Angela had been so unwilling to let Pharah in on this because there may be this or that part of herself that she wasn’t actually willing to give away to Pharah yet - but would have to share with the girl, who was in the same boat as she once had been. Pharah had not realized ahead of time that she might be prying into personal business more than she should have.

For the time being, this thought prompted her to sit back and wait. It was Mercy’s turf now.

“I know... at this point, people say ‘I’m sorry for your loss’,” Mercy said. “But I won’t. I hated it. I still do. It’s been years and I still hate it,” she admitted, her voice reflecting Caroline’s annoyance in a much milder way. “People who say that do not know what ‘loss’ means – and to them, it is just some set phrase.” She snorted, softly. “They have no idea that it means someone took your whole life from under your feet – everything that those hundreds of potential future scenarios that you dreamed up in your life were ever built upon. Because in whatever you dreamed up for yourself you wouldn’t have guessed – *ever* – that this was a possibility. That anything in the world could be this cruel and unfair to you and change your life like that.” She seemed angry and frustrated, thus amplifying the subtle ghosts of emotions in Carolina’s body language. “And these people? They just call it ‘loss’ and move on. Can’t even look you in the eyes because then they might have to deal with your pain and can no longer pretend it isn’t as intense as it is.” Mercy’s voice was shaking ever so slightly. Not much of this was played – maybe the exact nuances were tuned a little artificially – but there was real memory behind this and it clamped itself around Pharah’s heart and held on tightly.

Yet... it also had its impact on Carolina. Mercy had found the right words – had conveyed to Carolina that yes, she was someone who *did* understand because she knew what it was like. Undoubtedly, she knew what Carolina was going through and now the girl was conflicted – between her need to be stubborn and not let anyone through to her - and her need to latch on to the only person who could maybe relieve that ache.

She was struggling, poking the finger of her left hand into the bandage, onto the most blood soaked spot. Her face was a strain, but Pharah paid attention to it only briefly. She was distracted: Carolina’s left thumb was poking a deep dent into the bandage and her jaw clamped, the muscles above her cheeks swelling ever-so-slightly when the touch stung. Slowly, Pharah sat more

upright, watching. Hopefully, Mercy would not fail to continue.

Mercy took a heavy breath, pushing herself out of her own emotional moment, refocusing on the fact that this was about the teenager in front of her, not herself. “But I *am* sorry, Carolina. I can’t even begin to find the right words. Since then... I mean, I was much younger than you, but I was so certain that I wouldn’t wish this pain upon my worst enemies. And I think whatever you are going through at the moment - it might hit you so much more severely than it hit me and that it now hits the other younger children at the orphanage – those who don’t quite understand, have less memories of their parents or can adapt so much more easily.”

Carolina was shrinking in on herself, her attention fading. Pharah watched the change with worry. Mercy was not hitting the right words – her talk about adaptive minds was too much like the neurosurgeon in her, not the fellow orphan. When Mercy next side-glanced at her, Pharah subtly shook her head – don’t go this way.

Mercy’s frown at Pharah’s reaction was quick and almost unnoticeable. She quickly reconsidered her approach. “It was so hard,” she said after a second, her voice shaking a little again, as if she was just at the edge of crying. “Every day. I thought it would never end... it hurt... and I didn’t think anyone could ever understand it. Certainly not Susanne. And I just wanted it to stop hurting me – to *stop* being my every thought - *every* morning – and my torture when I tried to sleep.” She seemed desperate, completely laying out her memorized feelings, reckless with whatever that would do to her. “It would always come back to me: The fact that I was alone. It would hit me – suddenly and unfairly – out of nowhere when I had foolishly thought my mind had moved someplace else. Something would always bring me back. A butterfly that mom liked... a car that dad had claimed he would drive one day... a scent or a melody. There was just no escaping it and it did not ever want to let up.”

Pharah watched, concentrating on Carolina and that thumb that was pressing into her bandages. On the other side of that bandage, her fingers at curled into claws, digging in as well – harsh and merciless. It was difficult to keep her own mind from diving too far into what Mercy had said – the memories she had laid bare so emotionally. The woman she found to be so close to her heart – was pouring out her soul and there was doubt that every bit of story and emotion was nourished by real memories of pain. But Pharah would have to postpone the whole impact this had on her to a later time point. She had to keep her head close to the objective: This girl needed help, in more than one way.

She had no idea how far gone Mercy was in her own story and what her own words brought back into her mind, painfully so. She hoped Mercy was not getting carried away. Fareeha pushed herself to carefully reach out with her foot, poking Mercy’s back to grab her attention. Mercy did not wince, but after she had made sure that Carolina was all absorbed in the blood stains on her bandage, she slowly looked at her partner to see why she needed her attention.

Pharah slowly, so as to not catch Caroline’s attention from the corner of the girl’s eyes, rose her hand and mirrored Caroline’s movement – digging her thumb into her right palm – right on the bit of scar that was left from her fireworks incident. She raised eyebrows and sent Mercy a long look that was heavy with meaning.

Mercy nodded subtly – she knew already. The only question that was left was how to get Carolina to admit to it and, more importantly, accept treatment. Mercy turned back without signaling an answer to Pharah as to how she was going to proceed. She simply continued speaking.

“I was so lost. I was told to go out, but it did not help. I was given chores and tasks for distractions, as if that could stop me from feeling that hole in my heart.” She snorted at how ridiculous that was. “They wanted to force me to talk about how it felt, as if that wouldn’t make things worse.”

There was agreement in Carolina's still eyes. Pharah was so absorbed into contemplating the teenager, she almost missed how Mercy's hand wandered behind Mercy's back, making a gesture at Pharah to get her to join in. It took her a beat, but then she knew exactly where to tie in with Mercy's monologue.

"And... did you ever find a way, Mercy...?" Pharah asked softly. "You know... to relieve the pain?"

There was a pause. Caroline's head lifted just a little – she was looking for the secret to escape her dark emotions, hoping Mercy might know it.

Mercy let that pause stand for a moment, then sighed sadly. "I ... I wasn't as brave as Caroline here," she admitted, sounding almost embarrassed. "I realized eventually that the only relief I could get from one pain was by substituting it with another." She took a deep breath. "But... I could not hurt myself. Not directly. I was too much of a coward ever do that."

Suddenly, the relentless poking at the bandage stopped. Carolina realized that at least Mercy had figured her out.

Pharah slowly crossed her legs, trying to seem oblivious. "So what did you do?"

"I stopped eating," Mercy replied matter-of-factly. "It was the easiest way to feel pain, because it did not require doing anything. It required *not* doing something. And eventually, as expected, my stomach began to ache and I could concentrate on that pain instead of any other one."

A cold wave rushed over Pharah. She had already grasped that Mercy was not even allowing herself to make anything up. She might not have known Mercy perfectly well yet, but she could well guess that in this situation, Mercy decided that Caroline deserved to be treated with honesty. And this was honest – brutally and personally honest. And shocking.

Pharah felt torn in multiple directions at this point. A part of her hoped that Mercy did not have to live through this any further, another part hoped she would find something to continue with because she almost had Caroline's trust – and a third part of her knew, as a police woman, that what she feeling for Mercy did not belong here. She knew she should not want to get up and hold her and should not wish that she did not have to hear any more of this. But she could not do that – Mercy's painful memories was not what this was about.

Luckily, Mercy did not have to say anything else. It was Caroline who spoke – carefully, hopefully.

"Did it help?"

It was a question, but her motivation – hope – was more than clear. She even did so much as glance over, really seeing Mercy for the first time.

Mercy shook her head. "At first. And then my stomach got used to the emptiness... and the only comfort I had was that I was too exhausted and weak from eating so little that I started to not care about anything anymore. But when I *did* have a moment or the strength to care... my loneliness, my grief - it was all that I cared about. It was either that, or dreary emptiness."

Caroline slumped in on herself again, disappointed. Mercy did not know a magical solution, after all.

Pharah shifted audibly, making her presence known. "Obviously, you did end up eating again – or you would not be here, saving people's lives and taking care of the wounded and hurt," she

addressed Mercy. “What happened? What helped? What stopped the pain?”

It was the one thing that Caroline, in the end, needed to know.

Against Pharah’s expectations, Mercy did not respond, even though Caroline’s body was tense, all alert, waiting impatiently for the answer, a new little flame of hope in her reddened eyes. After a moment, Caroline turned her head completely to look at Mercy and the two of them exchanged a glance that Pharah could not quite catch.

Caroline’s gaze dropped sadly – Mercy’s answer had reached silently her before Mercy could tell it to Pharah: “It never stops hurting, Pharah.”

Caroline was about to draw in on herself again, when Mercy continued: “But it hurts *less*. But it’s not because of anything you do or *can* do – no, life leaves you struggling aimlessly there,” she said, sounding sad and upset as she presented this less than ideal solution to Carolina. “It only starts hurting less because even when it seems unfathomable, you do inevitably learn to live with it – you get used to the empty spot in your life and it becomes part of it. But there is so much you have to go through to get there. You first have to find something that keeps you going, despite everything, something grand enough to overpower the darkness – and then you have to work *so* hard on yourself. To turn your thoughts away from grief, to acknowledge reality and to stop feeling guilty every time you do as much as laugh because *they* are not here to laugh, too.” She took another breath and this time, as she continued, her voice was breaking slightly – she was pushing through a heap of emotions and it was struggle: “You have to learn in the hardest way to stop thinking that *every* moment of happiness you have is betraying their legacy, making them less important than they should be to you – that it is treason to be happy even though *your parents are dead*.”

Those last words were so harsh and sharp – and by far enough to bring both Caroline and Mercy over the edge, turning their eyes wet. It was the bitter, cold truth in the words that did it. And Pharah’s heart clenched again because Mercy had chosen this path, probably knowing very well what it would do to her and Carolina.

Pharah wished she could allow herself to get up and wrap her arms around Mercy. But it was among the worst things she could do – if only, because nobody would wrap their arms around Carolina, reminding her that unlike Mercy, she was left alone in her pain. And it wasn’t her job. Her job was to be an asset to this conversation – to get to a goal they had almost reached – not destroy all their efforts.

Carolina lifted her bandaged hand and bit into it, but this time she wasn’t mistreating the wound to feel the pain. She was trying to pull herself together to be able to speak. They waited until she could.

“What kept you going, Mercy?” she pressed out, almost choking.

“*They* did,” Mercy replied, her voice a little lighter. “Mom always fed me so well – made sure I always had enough to eat, even when we were out longer than expected or something else had kept her from shopping or cooking. Who was I to ignore the way she had cared for me all my life and do exactly what she had tried so hard to keep me from?” She sniffed, once, but no sound came from Carolina as she was contemplating the sentiment behind those words. “Who was I to trample so heartlessly on how my parents had always done their best to keep me from harm? They had taught me to be careful, to dress appropriately, to eat enough, to mind my step and consider my actions so I would *not* get hurt. And I was doing it deliberately. That was not a way to make my parents proud...” Her last bit, spoken with an unstable quiver to her voice, sounded like a question, though it wasn’t quite meant that way.

Pharah shifted again. As before, she was making a little noise before she would barge into the conversation. “And what did you think would make them proud?”

In the reflection, Pharah could see a short smile grace Mercy’s expression, her tears momentarily turning into those of a happier person. “Mama always taught me to be there for others,” she explained. “And papa always complimented me when I went after the things I wanted.” It was followed by a half-choked chuckle. “Not exactly the box of sweets, but anything that required my determination and my own effort to achieve – not accepting a rejection for the school play, for example, but managing to be allowed to prove my talent again, after I had practiced a lot more. Figuring out how to open up the kitchen ladder to reach the cocoa all by myself... that sort of thing.” She smiled fondly at the memory this time. “So that is what I did. I decided I wanted to be a doctor – I wanted to help people and I wanted to work hard to achieve this – all of this. The degree, the probation, the income and the reputation.”

Carolina had stopped crying – she was listening and likely turning her own thoughts around in her head.

“And this,” Mercy gestured at the room slowly, “– this was not an intended path for an orphan. We were encouraged to get an apprenticeship and get our own little jobs quickly. The orphanage could not feed us all the way through college, pay tuitions and books and scripts and learning materials. That was not considered an option. So my only chance was to get a scholarship that would pay the entire start of my career for me.”

“Damn,” Pharah blurted out without meaning to. It was the sudden determination that resurfaced through Mercy’s memory that had caught her so. She could see it – she could see a younger version of that incredible woman, making that decision and not stopping until she got what she wanted. And it was impressive.

“I studied. I aced my grades. I skipped a grade and then another one. And whenever I got weary or tired, I thought about how proud it would have made them – and how much I personally wanted it. And I found that other people would fill bits and pieces of my parents’ roles – my proud mentors, my peers, even Lynn. They could never *replace* my parents, but they could give me some of the things that I needed to find the strength to go on.”

Pharah smiled. “I think you did exactly what they would have hoped for you. They’d be very proud.” She did not know herself whether what she was saying was just for Mercy now – or any sort of strategy to be able to treat Carolina.

“The truth is, mom and dad are not here, but at least I became someone they hoped I would be. I will never stop missing them, never stop thinking that this isn’t fair... but... I think I did well and by now I realize it’s okay to move on. I found new ways to be happy and new people to love. That’s okay. Humans can’t live any other way, I guess.” She contemplated her own words for a moment. “But it seriously sucks that it all takes so much hurt and time. I am not going to lie to you Carolina – it isn’t easy. And it takes long. But it’s not going to be like this forever... and the harder you work on the idea that your parents would be okay with you moving on, the easier it is going to get. I know it.”

Carolina sniffed, her body still tense. The idea of moving on – of leaving her parents’ memory a little behind, did not seem to please her.

“Hey. It doesn’t have to be today,” Pharah reminded her. “Or tomorrow. Grief is also something that needs space.”

Mercy nodded. “And pain. Whatever kind of pain, right?” She reached out a hand, pushing it just a little under the bandaged hand that was resting on Carolina’s thighs again. Carolina twitched,

about to move her hand away from Mercy.

“I’m not judging you,” Mercy said softly. “Back then, I would have wished I had been this brave – just for a moment, to feel the sweet relief of distraction. I couldn’t judge you if I wanted to.” She shoved her hand a little further under Carolina’s hurt one. “But I think that your parents would have brought you here as well, if you had gotten hurt like that in any other way. And they don’t want you to go through life with paralyzed, stiff or numb fingers, I would guess.”

Mercy cautiously lifted Carolina’s hand and pulled it closer to herself, into the light of the lamp that Pharah had brightened earlier. The girl let her, staring at her own thighs – finally, the embarrassment of what she had done to herself was creeping in. Not because of Mercy, Susanne or Pharah – but because of what her parents would have thought. Pharah reached for the edge of the chair below her knees, got up a little and scooted closer with it, almost to Mercy’s side.

“You know, Mercy is really good at putting hands back together,” she said, showing her own, scarred palm. “She put me back together and I am perfectly fine now.”

“Yepp. That idiot launched a firecracker from her hand for no reason,” Mercy grinned, well knowing that it was a lie – and that Pharah wouldn’t dare to correct her. She pouted instead while Mercy slowly unwrapped the injured hand. The bandage was sticking to the wound and Carolina did her best not to hiss as Mercy tore the fabric from the skin.

The nail, if she really had shoved one in there, was no longer there – just a nasty-looking wound with sticky, half-dry blood everywhere. Mercy turned the palm carefully, looking at it from different angles, then poked the fingers here and there and checked Carolina’s reaction.

She looked up at the girl, seeming a tad more serious. “First of all – I can probably fix this well enough for you to come out of this without much more than a scar – maybe even one that is tinier than Pharah’s. However - there are two ways we can do this,” she said. She was speaking more like the doctor now – but the important part was that she wasn’t treating Carolina like a child or like someone who was stupid enough to deliberately hurt herself like this. She was treating Carolina like an adult and letting her take part in what was happening.

Carolina was looking at her, waiting and staying attentive. She did not seem to be very disturbed by the look of her mistreated hand that was still between her and Mercy.

“I can completely numb down your hand and put it back together. You will feel absolutely nothing, but your thumb and fingers will feel unpleasant – like they have swollen to five times the size they are now - for many hours,” she explained. “We will not find out until much later, whether you obtained any lasting damage. The other option is that I use less anesthetic, but you will feel what I am doing when I am sewing you back together – and you will still feel some pain. Not as much as you would otherwise, but it will hurt. However, you will regain feeling in your hand soon and be able to find out very quickly, whether everything still works nicely.”

“There... there isn’t any other way, right? You... you couldn’t make me sleep or something?”

Mercy shook her head. “The wound you have does not warrant the danger and the strain a full narcosis would put on your body.” She looked seriously at Carolina. “These are the two options I can give you. And it’s your call to make. Not mine, not Pharah’s, not Susanne’s.” She paused. “Yours.”

I lied. The decision is yours, *not* Carolina's. Have fun.

As an added extra: The decision you will make will impact a couple of other things, though I will not tell you how they are connected.

These are the other things that will be decided by your vote:

1. What they will talk about as Carolina is being patched up (Carolina's future goals or Pharah and Mercy's relationship)
2. What Mercy and Pharah will talk about afterwards (Mercy or Carolina).
3. Where Mercy and Pharah will go afterwards. (Mercy's or Pharah's)

~~Your poll is here!~~

Get a full an anesthetic (unpleasant, long-lasting, no quick assessment of the damage.)

47%

Get a partial anesthetic (painful, but quick re-gain of function to check the damage)

53%

Thank you for 301 votes!

By the way: I literally had to make that same choice before (I cut my thumb with a scalpel. I am not very dexterous).

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